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Viviana Hopkinson M.A. (Ed)

WHY DO I HAVE TO DO KEY SKILLS?

**ACCOUNTING FOR YEAR ONE ENGINEERING
COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON WORK
AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY**

**A thesis submitted to The Open University for the
degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EdD)**

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ABSTRACT

As part of the increasing vocationalisation of education, a succession of Governments have identified deficiencies in what are now termed Key Skills to be a major block to enhanced worker performance and economic well-being for low-achieving students. As I teach Key Skills in an isolated College of Further Education in North West England, I am often asked by such students why they have to study Key Skills. As I wanted to find out more about such attitudes inimical to teaching and learning, this thesis reports a case study of the interconnected factors within the student biographies that have affected their life experiences and which underlie their perspectives on Key Skills. The bounded case study research in one college, involving, firstly, one cohort of first year employed engineering apprentices (N=8); a second cohort of first year college based Motor Vehicle trainees (N=8) not in employment and interview with three past and present Coordinators of Key Skills (N=3). Data was collected using three main methods: Focus Groups, individual biographical interviews (N=6) and structured interviews to provide data, including triangulation with my own perspectives and experiences. An analysis of the student data indicated significant background social structural interactive forces at play creating their Key Skills perspectives, the most important factors being social class, mediated through and by the family and peers, the locality (a traditional working class cultural dominated primary industry based town) and a form of macho masculinity. The dominant staff perspective on Key Skills is that of a deficit model of student capability, whilst the curriculum model is that of an independent Key Skills provision. Consequently, initial suggestions for the development of my own and the college practice are presented as part of an ongoing lifelong learning perspective

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CONTENTS	PAGE
ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
INDEX OF TABLES AND FIGURES	
TABLES	7
FIGURES.....	8
ACRONYMS.....	9
1. Chapter One: Introduction.....	10
1.1 Personal background: My life history	10
1.2 Background and focus of research.....	11
1.3 My position in this research.....	12
1.4 Aim of the research.....	13
1.5 Content of the thesis	13
1.6 A note on style	16
2. Chapter Two: The Literature Review	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Research questions and the direction of research.....	18
2.3 Background aspects of research	20
2.4 Aspects of social class	20
2.5 Cultural and academic capital within social class	30
2.5.1 Class fractions.....	32
2.6 Aspects of masculinity.....	33
2.7 Aspects of locality: Southlakes Town and the Southlakes Peninsula in the north west of England	38
2.8 Key Skills	43
2.8.1 Key Skills and Curriculum Development in Further Education	44
2.8.2 The curriculum and Key Skills models in Further Education	48
2.9 Conclusion	52
3. Chapter Three: Methodology	54
3.1 Introduction	54
3.2 Background of research	54
3.2.1 The nature of reality and empirical assumptions.....	55
3.2.2 Ontology and Critical Realism	57
3.3 Discourse analysis as a research tool.....	59
3.4 The analysis of language discourse: A reflective approach.....	60
3.5 Background of biographical method	62

3.5.1	Constructing biographical case studies.....	65
3.5.2	The significance of biographical case studies to my research.....	66
3.6	Positioning theory.....	67
3.7	Methods of research I:	
	Focus groups and personal interviews.....	69
3.7.1	Participants in the focus group	70
3.8	Management of focus groups	71
3.9	Methods of Data Collection II:	
	The student biographical interviews.....	71
3.10	Methods of Data Collection III:	
	Key Skills Coordinators interviews.....	73
3.11	A structured approach to analysis.....	74
3.12	Analysis of data: an example of a transcript into students' attitudes towards Key Skills.....	76
3.13	Ethics of social research	80
3.14	Conclusion	83
4.	Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis	84
4.1	Introduction	84
4.2	Group analysis	85
4.3	The students.....	85
4.3.1	The Students' Voice: Conscious of their own consciousness.....	87
4.3.2	Marc and William: the biography of a motor vehicle student and an apprentice in engineering, and their different orientations to learning	90
4.4	Focus Groups, personal interviews and sets of discourses.....	95
4.4.1	Social class and family allegiances	96
4.4.2	Masculinity	101
4.4.3	Attitudes about their local town 'Southlakes Town'	107
4.4.4	Attitude towards Key Skills.....	111
4.5	Conclusions	117
5.	Chapter Five: Staff interviews, past and present Coordinators for Key Skills.....	120
5.1	Introduction	120
5.2	Coordinators of Key Skills' background and qualifications	120
5.3	Coordinators of Key Skills: Interviews	122
5.4	College Policy on Key Skills.....	124
5.5	Coordinators of Key Skills: Data Analysis.....	126
5.5.1	College Key Skills Policy issues	129
5.5.2	Students' attitudes to Key Skills.....	134
5.6	Gender issues in classroom management	139

5.7	Students' occupational aspirations	143
5.8	Conclusions	148
6.	Chapter 6: A research review and personal reflection	149
6.1	Introduction	149
6.2	A research review	149
6.3	Personal reflection	153
6.4	Coordinators of Key Skills and their views.....	158
6.5	The way forward.....	159
6.6	Conclusions	163
7.	Chapter Seven: The research experience and reflection practice and learning from research	164
7.1	Introduction	164
7.2	Reflection in practice.....	164
7.3	Contributions to knowledge.....	167
7.4	Recommendations for future research.....	168
7.5	Limitations to this study	169
7.6	Conclusions	170
8.	REFERENCES	171
A.	ANNEX	181
A1	Meeting criteria checklist	181
A2	Student focus groups schedule	182
A3	Student focus groups transcript	184
A4	Student personal interview schedule	195
A5	Student personal interview transcript	199
A6	Coordinators of Key Skills schedule	206
A7	Coordinators of Key Skills transcript	208
A8	Southlakes College: Key Skills Policy	224

INDEX OF TABLES

Table 1	A comparison of Apprenticeship and Motor Vehicle Courses at Southlakes College	29
Table 2	Percentage breakdown by employment sector Adapted source (Bolton & Hyland, 2003:19; LSC, 2006-2007:9)	40
Table 3	Transcript conventions	77
Table 4	Qualifications equivalences.....	136

INDEX OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The three stages of Biographical Case Studies..... 65

Figure 2 Structured research approach. Adapted source
 (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003:43)..... 74

ACRONYMS

AON - Application of Number
APL – Accreditation of Prior Learning
BIS – Business Innovation and Skills
BNFL - British Nuclear Fuels Limited
CFE - College of Further Education
CITB - Construction Industry Training Board
COMM - Communication
CPD - Continuing Personal/Professional Development
DfEE - Department for Employment and Education
DfES - Department for Education and Skills
EdD - Doctor in Education
EMA - Education Maintenance Allowance
FE - Further Education
GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ - General National Vocational Qualification
ICT - Information and Communication Technology
IOLAP - Improving Own Learning And Performance
LSC - Learning and Skills Council
MA (ed) - Master Degree in Education by research
NETT - National Education and Training Target
NVQ - National Vocational Qualification
OU - Open University
PGCE - Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PTLS - Personal Learning and Thinking Skills
QCA - Qualifications & Curriculum Authority
SCWM - Social Class Worldview Model
SMT - Senior Management Team
UCLAN - University of Central Lancashire
VET - Vocational Education and Training

1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Personal background: My life history

Though it is not immediately obvious to anyone who meets me, I did not come to England until I was twelve years old. My father, an Argentinian national, was sent to the UK by the Argentine Government, and my mother, sister and I came with him. Consequently, I still regard Spanish as my first language, and English as my second language. Coming to England was a real adventure, necessitating not only learning a new language, but also to embrace and live within an alien culture, though, because of my father's job and my mother's art and design specialist, still ostensibly a middle class culture. Migration to England, and the resulting steep learning curve for schooling and higher education, has left me with a continuous desire to learn (what we now call lifelong learning), but also with an incomplete knowledge about different cultures within English life. I recognise now that I have had a relatively privileged upbringing.

My first degree was in music, which I initially taught in a secondary school in North West England, concurrently with a language teaching post in a College of Further Education in the same town. Having subsequently got married and started a family, I remained in the College, having a number of jobs as a result of reorganisations of college curriculum. My current post, which I began in the year 2000, is that of teacher of Key Skills, especially to low achieving students. It was then that I first came across students who, in no uncertain terms, told me that they did not want to learn, and certainly did not want to study Key Skills. It was an attitude towards learning that I have continued to find difficult to

understand, particularly as the students persist in making teaching them difficult. The situation is made worse, it seems, because I am a woman. I pride myself on my awareness, striving to be reflexive, by which I mean:

‘The process of critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences; (b) an acknowledgement of the inquirer’s place in the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand and a means for a critical examination of the entire research process’ (Schwandt, 1997: 136).

As I wanted to become an experienced teacher, I decided to study and understand the underachieving students who are antithetical to Key Skills prior to identifying possible alternative actions for future development. As I am not, however, a social scientist, I have both struggled with the concepts and used literature on a ‘need to know’ basis. This research, therefore, is very much focused upon understanding the world of the students through their biographies and attitudes towards Key Skills. Though I posit ways forward in the final chapter of this thesis, that period of action research is the next step in my personal voyage of learning.

1.2 Background and focus of research

My research thus aims to investigate the lives of low-achieving students, and the effect their lives have upon the implementation of Key Skills in Further Education. My initial response to the male students, however, was one of exasperation and hostility. I found myself torn between two factors: 1) government policies trying to address perceived deficits in post 16 education in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy skills in order to make the students more employable; and 2) the students’ rejection of academic work, leading to

indifference, hostility and non-cooperation during classes. My own biography, initially based upon higher middle class values, social distance and incompatibility of experiences, attitudes and values initially caused my lack of comprehension about such students. The teacher-reflection in practice approach led me to analyse the values underpinning Key Skills in Further Education as well as seek to understand male students' views towards education and work. Consequently, I have experienced a remarkable change of my views and attitude towards male students at the college following this research.

1.3 My position in this research

After achieving my Master's Degree, the opportunity presented itself to investigate a particular topic related to my work. At first I focused my attention upon certain key areas with regard to Key Skills in Further Education. My reading started in the year 2002 by considering how political changes affect curriculum planning in FE, and to what extent these reforms have a direct impact on the learners and employers. In my experience, at the beginning of their first term, further education students from a wide range of National Vocational Qualification (N.V.Q.) courses at different levels often ask the question: "Why do I have to do Key Skills?" The term Key Skills has been used since the Curriculum 2000 by the then Labour Government, though other synonyms such as '*transferable skills*', '*core skills*', '*life skills*' and '*flexible skills*' have been used too. Key Skills refers to mental and manual skills that are considered to be necessary to a wide range of occupations. The application of Key Skills in post-16 education came about because the government asserted

that the UK was not producing the numbers or the types of workers considered necessary for the UK to compete in the global market.

1.4 Aim of the research

The overall aim of the research is to analyse how educationally low-achieving young adults construct and understand their relationship to the world of work, and the implications of that understanding for, and experience of, Key Skills in vocational education. The research questions are:

Q1: What have been, and are, the biographical experiences most influential in causing the students to develop their current expressed work and life perspectives?

Q2: What is the extent and nature of students understanding of Key Skills in Further Education in relation to seeking and obtaining work, (nationally, regionally, and locally)?

These two questions, developed during the first year of study, served to refine the research aim.

1.5 Content of the thesis

At this point, it may be useful to outline briefly the content of the chapters included in this thesis. The thesis is structured in six chapters in addition to this chapter. These seven chapters build on each other, and are crucial for building and concluding the theoretical framework on students' perceptions of education and work. The following chapters are:

Chapter 2: The literature review. This chapter focuses on four perspectives which form the background to my research. The four perspectives are: 1) aspects of social class and family allegiances, 2) aspects of masculinities, 3) aspects of locality, and 4) Key Skills and its development in the Further Education curriculum and Key Skills models. The literature review relates to the research approach, its context and location and was added to regularly during the life of my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology. This chapter explains the data collection methods, which are focus groups and interviews with students and Key Skills Coordinators past and present. The philosophical framework is provided by critical realism, involving a consideration of ontology, realist analysis and positioning theory. This chapter, in addition, investigates the background, construction and types of biographical case studies in order to illuminate students' perceptions about education and work. The chapter also describes the participants - taking part in this research and the management of the focus groups and personal interviews as well as the subsequent analysis. This chapter concludes with the ethical considerations applied in this research.

Chapter 4: Findings and data analysis. This chapter presents an analysis of the students' responses in the focus groups and personal interviews, drawing out the interconnected set of discourses in their responses. The research focuses on four areas: 1) aspects of social class and family allegiances, 2) aspects of masculinities, 3) aspects of locality and, 4) Students Attitudes towards Key Skills. In addition, this chapter provides an analysis of the biography of two

students selected at random from both areas (one motor vehicle student and one engineering apprentice student). In chapter 4, conclusions are drawn from students' own interpretations of their own realities in relation to their perceptions and attitudes towards work and education.

Chapter 5: Staff interviews: past and present Coordinators of Key Skills.

This chapter analyses the outcomes of the interviews with Coordinators of Key Skills past and present. This chapter also critically reviews the College Key Skills Policy document which prescribes how government policy on the implementation of Key Skills should be carried out at Southlakes College.

Chapter 6: A research review and personal reflection. This chapter reviews the knowledge gained through this investigation in present and reflect on the main outcomes of the research for the teaching of Key Skills. This chapter is also concerned with the need to review my own teaching practices and how my views about teaching and learning have been transformed as a result of this research.

Chapter 7: The research experience, reflective practice and learning from research. This chapter concludes the thesis by reflecting upon the research process, and outlining my contributions to knowledge as well as suggesting some potential directions for future research. It also incorporates a review of my own reflective practice, curriculum models, development and the delivery of Key Skills in an attempt to encourage a positive adjustment in students' attitudes towards education and work. The consequences arising from this

research potentially have wide ranging implications for the way in which Key Skills is currently organised and taught. This research will encompass implications being drawn at a number of levels, these being self, colleagues, and senior members of staff, college and regional/national Policy forums/debates, government agencies, for Policy and professional practice and possible publication. The end of this research is actually the start of another project for me, as I have realised the necessity to engage with the literature and pedagogic practices associated with teaching young men. I realised, also, that research thus is lifelong.

1.6 A note on style

In this thesis I have used a combination of two different styles of writing. The style of writing in the first person and an impersonal style traditionally connected with academic writing. The use of the first person reflects my values and beliefs as a teacher-researcher and also accounts for the work I have developed during this investigation. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this research in order to maintain the anonymity of the town, the students, staff and the College.

2. Chapter Two: The Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the three main aspects of my research. These are the nature of biographical accounts, the background factors considered to affect students and Key Skills curriculum organisation and delivery. The concern of this chapter is to locate my investigation in relation to students' current perceptions about education and work as those arise from their social and cultural background.

In my experience, at the beginning of their first term, Further Education students studying a wide range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) often ask the tutor the question: "Why do I have to do Key Skills?" The term Key Skill, whilst being used widely and interchangeably with 'core skill' or 'transferable skill', refers to mental and manual skills (e.g. computing skills) considered by the Government to be common and necessary to a wide range of occupations, and thus necessary in vocational study programmes.

As a teacher of Key Skills in a College of Further Education (CFE) in the North West of England, I initially commenced this study to investigate the history of the concept of Key Skills, and its overlap with and development out of, other related concepts such as transferable skills and core skills. The research evolved, however, into an attempt to describe and analyse the world of Key Skills from the point of view of the students, many of whom, despite having 'failed' at school, will have clear (and often sceptical) views about the benefits of education for work and life generally. It was hypothesised that the

background and experientially based beliefs and perceptions of the students are the key factors in their attitudes and motivation towards Key Skills, for:

‘Perception and learning are greatly assisted by the active manipulation and exploration of the world, by interaction with objects, including other people. Learning is significantly retarded where this is not possible, and subjects are restricted to using only their cognitive faculties, merely contemplating the world’ (Sayer, 1992:52).

This research consequently focuses explicitly upon the students, seeking to understand where the students are coming from - their educational biographies.

2.2 Research questions and the direction of research

The study recognises that it is difficult to separate students’ prior and contemporary life experiences from their attitudes towards learning, for students’ views about education, as in everything else, are constructed out of a mixture of family traditions, local cultural norms and immediate experiences, and are rarely fully formed, static or uniform. This situation was understood by, amongst others, Säljö who many years ago noted that:

‘The fact that people approach learning in different ways could be understood as a reflection of the variety of beliefs or conceptions which they hold about learning’ (Säljö, 1979:444).

For the students to engage themselves in the learning of Key Skills, they need to understand the relevance of what they are doing, as well as recognise their own part in the learning process. Although there seems to be a perception that low-achieving young adults will continue to achieve low results, or are marginalised or disadvantaged in relation to their traditional peers (James,

1995:451) this study questions such pessimistic views, seeing all students as participants in learning processes inside and outside education.

In my view, there is the potential for each individual student to determine her/his own approach to learning and facilitate her/his own academic success. Social class and culture, however, along with family and peer pressure, may affect the extent to which individual students are able to break out of these potentially limiting factors.

Recognition of this situation may require F.E. teachers to review and rethink their own attitudes as well as teaching activities so as to provide 'enabling conditions', including challenge and insights. The route to learning and achieving success lies in the recognition and challenging of the values, beliefs and perceptions of students that affect their involvement in the learning process.

At the same time, as a realist researcher, I am aware that the students are not necessarily aware of, or able to articulate, the underlying factors such as social class, masculinity and a particular relatively isolated geographical location. As a result, I am trying to develop and present both a set of concepts and an understanding that holds true both in terms of the data and what other people have written.

2.3 Background aspects of research

The following section describes four perspectives which have a direct relationship to my research sample, and the need thus to theorise about:

- 1) **Aspects of Social Class:** Structural groupings of social class give rise to dominant and subordinate cultures as well as subcultures related to social class fractions. An understanding of related cultural capital and academic capital within aspects of social class is also necessary.
- 2) **Aspects of Locality:** The physical environment of the locality is important too, especially as the case study site involves working class families in an isolated working class town.
- 3) **Aspects of Masculinities:** Working class concepts of masculine values and ways of behaving in a working class town is the cultural context of family, education and work perspectives.
- 4) **Key Skills and Key Skills development:** This section explains briefly what Key Skills are, analysing their developments in post 16-education through official reports, college documents and related curriculum issues.

2.4 Aspects of Social Class

According to Marxist analytical approaches, social class analysis initially operates at two main levels (Barnett, 1994:56; Nollman & Strasser, 2007: 373)

The first level is that of ownership of some of the means of production other

than labour, such as land (the aristocracy), productive capital (the entrepreneurs) or circulatory capital (financiers/bankers/hedge funds) (Perkin, 1969). The vast majority of people, however, do not own such means of production, though they may own various amounts of consumption capital (e.g. homes, cars and other goods) considered necessary to live their lives and be able to present themselves for work.

This first level of ownership of productive capital, then, is largely absent and obscured for most people, though there is likely to be some awareness of difference. (Bottero & Irwin, 2003:468-469). Subsequently, a second more visible level by which social class is identified is through occupation, though that too is stratified into mental and/or manual labour. Here, class identities are located not only in the relations between people of different strata, but in the relations between groups of people in the same stratum (ibid p.470). The class analysis offered by Bottero & Irwin sees social interaction and lifestyle to have an orderly and consistent pattern constrained by hierarchy' (ibid p.473). Hierarchical positions are 'an important cultural force in people's lives' (ibid p.473), for where people share similar social class locations, they tend to share a common cultural background and 'social comfort' which arises from people living with similar kinds of people. These shared cultural and social practices are embedded in social practices arising from and within hierarchies and may diminish the experiences of inequality (Wright, 2009b:107) in the social locality and in every day social practices.

The central focus of Wright's research has been the process through which people obtain the cultural, motivational and educational resources that affect their occupations in the labour market (Wright, 2009b:102). The 'conditions of life' in childhood are the 'class background' where key attributes are acquired, for:

'Cultural background, skills and motivation are key elements to determine people's economic prospects. Still, there are inequalities in different positions of employment and individuals' positions. The fate of individuals depends not just on the micro-level processes they encounter in their lives, or on the social structures within which those lives take place, but on the trajectory system as a whole' (Wright, 2009b:110).

At the same time, it is misleading to treat the underlying power relations that support a given structure of class locations as fixed, for this stance tends to substantiate an erroneous view that the 'fate of individuals is simply a function of their attributes and individual circumstances' (Wright, 2009b:111). Instead, social class is important as an analytical device as it allows researchers to analyse structures and processes across six areas, these being:

1. Distributional locations of social groups and individuals within those groups (relations of social classes to each other);
2. Subjective salience – the extent to which individuals, because of their similar/same class position, espouse similar values, views and perspectives, and possibly realise this (social class culture and class consciousness);
3. Life Chance effects – inequalities (opportunity access and hoarding) that arise from positions in class structures;

4. Antagonistic Conflicts – conflicts that arise due to class structures and the evolution of capitalism (e.g. why should students attend new courses in order to re-train themselves such as the Key Skills programme?);
5. Historical variation – how class attitudes and values evolve across generations or in different localities; and,
6. Emancipation – the developments required for groups and individuals to be able to maximise their potential (Therborn, 2008: 144).

Whilst Therborn identifies the terrain upon which social class operates, Wright offers three related but distinct causal processes relevant to class analysis:

1. The Marxist tradition, which focuses upon inequalities, exploitation and domination between social classes and the effects of such upon material life conditions of individuals and social groups;
2. The Weberian tradition, which focuses upon mechanisms of social exclusion and opportunity hoarding that differentiates social classes, affording people in middle class jobs some control over economic resources and pathways while excluding others; and
3. The stratification approach, which focuses upon the social processes that, though socially created and sustained (such as education) effectively differentiate and 'sort' people into different social class positions, and positions within social classes (Wright, 2009a:109-110).

The combination of these three approaches to class analysis can contribute to a deeper understanding in identifying different causal processes at work in shaping the micro and macro aspects of inequality in capitalist societies.

In effect, there are at least three other types of capital that people are able to accumulate and utilise in their environment (Liu, 2002). The first type of capital is 'human capital', which can be thought of as physical abilities and traits as well as accrued experiences that are valued such as educational qualifications and employment (Liu, 2002:356). The second type of capital is 'social capital' - the social relationships and affiliations that people use to gain or maintain one's perceived social class (ibid, p.356). This second type of capital involves 'who you know' - those people able to promote or play a major factor in people's lives. The third type of capital is 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1999), which comprises the cultural norms, values and 'tastes and aesthetics' that people develop as a result of their experiences (Liu, 2002:356).

Though still aggregational, and to some extent crude, social positioning related to occupation such as in the Registrar General's Classifications of Social Class, is the most widely accepted shorthand measure of social class (Brewer, 1986:131; Reay, 2004:57). Two general factors underpin this classification: the first being the status of the occupation of oneself and/or of one's parents, the second being the level of remuneration (income) that the different occupations attract and/or are able to command on the basis of such factors as specialized knowledge and expertise, usually bulwarked by educational qualifications (Machin, 2003; Wright, 2009b). Whilst there are anomalies, such as sports

stars, these two factors (status and income) do tend to mutually interact and support each other, income then going on to affect, and interact with, life styles and life chances, which in turn structure the generation and expression of cultures, subcultures and contracultures (the latter being opposed to the dominant culture of a society) that also form the context for intergenerational renewal and continuance.

The Registrar General's classification of social class (below) is the nearest thing there is to an official definition of social class, based upon occupation:

- I Professional occupations - e.g. doctors and lawyers.
- II Managerial and lower professional occupations - e.g. managers and teachers.
- III (N) Non-manual skilled occupations - e.g. office workers.
- III (M) Manual skilled occupations - e.g. bricklayers, coalminers.
- IV Semi-skilled occupations - e.g. postal workers.
- V Unskilled occupations - e.g. porters, dustmen.

The Registrar General's generic categorisation of social class allows us to perceive and analyse class fractions (Ball, 2003; Ball et al., 1999; Maguire, et.al., 1999; Reay, 1998; Reay, 2002:56; Vincent & Ball, 2006). Class fractions are subsections within a class that differ experientially in economic position, identity, skill level and culture. Consequently, social classes and class fractions possess varying amounts of the different types of capital (social, economic, and cultural) described above (Bourdieu, 1999:127). Whilst social capital is

generated through social processes and networks (Reay, 2004b:57), cultural capital is about the centrality of family culture (norms, values and perspectives) as the dominant agency of cultural reproduction, for it is through the family that children initially learn and practice ways of thinking, behaving as well as dispositions, such as that towards education (Reay, 2004b:57).

The Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) was developed by Liu (2002) to clarify social class in people's lives. The SCWM attempts to go beyond the objective indices of social class such as income, education, and occupation 'toward a phenomenological framework of social class (Liu, 2002:356). The foundational premise of the SCWM is that everyone exists in a locality (e.g. neighborhoods, boroughs, peer and family groups) in which there are expectations of, opportunities and demands on, people to be a certain way (e.g. to know about particular art and culture) and have certain possessions (e.g. a certain type of car) in order to retain some status with others in that environment.

The implication, of course, in having economic cultures is that there potentially are multiple economic subcultures (i.e., multiple middle class fractions). Within each economic subculture, people are expected to accumulate certain resources (i.e., capital) that they can use to remain congruent with others in that environment. Individuals and families are motivated to accrue and maintain valued resources within their cultural context (Liu, 2002:356).

These ‘valued resources’ or forms of capital may have no objective exchange value but are significant to an individual because he or she experiences such resources as necessary to maintaining or gaining his or her perceived social class. Students’ experience of a particular position in the class stratum leads the individual student to understand what it is about themselves that is being identified by that social position. In relation to social class and courses at Southlakes College, students might define themselves within the class stratum according to the sort of course on which they are able to enrol.

The research assumes a class conceptual framework for the two focus groups - Northern Engineering Company apprentices and Motor Vehicle full time students- in terms of class fractions and status hierarchies within the working class (Manual skilled, Semi-skilled, and Unskilled). The relationship of the different categories to each student grouping is confirmed partially by students’ prior educational achievements in senior schools. This educational subdivision within working class occupations is refracted through GCSE results leading to differential enrolments onto vocational courses within the Craft and Engineering Department at Southlakes College. Locally, these vocational groups (from higher to lower school achievements, and thus achieved status) are:

- Northern Engineering Company: Electrical,
- Northern Engineering Company: Computer Numerical Control, British Aerospace & Electronic Systems: Mechanical Pipe Fitting,
- Northern Engineering Company: Fabrication & Welding,

- College Engineering Courses (if vacancies arise at Northern Engineering Company, then students can apply for an apprenticeship at the end of the first term at the college),
- Motor Vehicle Apprenticeships and,
- Motor Vehicle College based student groups.

These gradations, though informal, are likely to be perceived by parents, to some degree, and be the basis of their advice to their children at the time of the children's entry into labour markets and vocational education. Table One below involves my adaptation of the careers information provided by Southlakes College. The information is placed in one table in order to show the differences and the college course requirements to allow readers to compare the two main vocational areas under investigation: the Motor Vehicle Course and the Engineering Apprenticeship course.

INFORMATION ABOUT APPRENTICESHIP AND MOTOR VEHICLE FITTING COURSES	APPRENTICESHIP (IN ENGINEERING WITHIN THE LOCAL EMPLOYERS)	VEHICLE FITTING (CITY & GUILDS 4000 NVQ 1)
A WHAT IS AN APPRENTICESHIP/ MOTOR VEHICLE FITTING?	An Apprenticeship means that students learn on the job, build up knowledge and skills, gain qualifications and earn money whilst at Southlakes College. F/Time.	This qualification contains subject areas derived from industry standards developed and selected for those working in the motor industry. F/Time.
ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR AN APPRENTICESHIP/ MOTOR VEHICLE FITTING COURSE	A minimum of 4 GCSE's at grades A - E, or a GNVQ Foundation, NVQ Level 1, Diploma Level 1 or equivalent qualification. For the Advanced Apprentice NVQ 3 it is required to have an NVQ 2 or other equivalent qualification. The full Apprenticeship programme is open to all individuals aged 16-24, with the opportunity for adults, over the age of 25, to undertake apprenticeships in some areas.	A minimum of 2 passes A-G at GCSE level including Maths and a Science subject and aged 16-24.
ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF APPRENTICESHIPS?	Yes. An appropriate National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at either Level 2 or Level 3 in the following Craft Engineering areas: Electrical Fabrication & Welding Mechanical Pipe Fitting.	No. In the second year students can specialise in the following (subject to finding an employer): Fast-Fit Technician Light Vehicle Body & Paint Light Vehicle Technician.
ADDITIONAL SUBJECTS	Key Skills qualifications such as Communication, Maths and I.C.T, team working, problem-solving all at Level 2 or Level 3 depending on students' prior achievements. Apprenticeships can also be a stepping stone to university.	Key Skills qualifications such as Communication, Maths and I.C.T, all at Level 1 or Level 2 depending on students' prior achievements. Students will be given the opportunity to participate in three weeks of work experience in a local garage.
HOW LONG DOES AN APPRENTICESHIP/ MOTOR VEHICLE COURSE TAKE?	They usually take from one to three years. First year with one day in situ and second year full time in work with one day release at the college in order to attend theory lessons. 1 st year earnings: £500, 2 nd Year: £750.	Full-time over one year then work at a garage during the second year with one day release at the college to do the theory work. 1 st Year earnings: nothing. 2 nd year earnings: £340.

Table 1: A comparison of Apprenticeship and Motor Vehicle courses at Southlakes College.

In this investigation, the student respondents are poised between past and future events (Bowles & Gintis, 1976:129; McDowell, 2003:836; Usher, 1988:131), for the 'reorganisation of the past goes hand in hand with an anticipation of the future' (Usher, 1988:23).

2.5 Cultural and academic capital within social class

The cultural dispositions and behaviours (cultural capital) involved in belonging to, and within a particular social class or class fraction have relevance to the understanding of the functioning of the education system and academic capital, academic capital being:

'The guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)' (Ball, 2003:23).

The distribution of academic capital is closely related to the transmission of cultural capital within the family and in particular 'in its earliest conditions of acquisition through the more or less visible marks they leave' (ibid: 18).

Inherited cultural capital, embodied in the family itself, are part of an accrual of class resources (Skeggs, 2004:173).

Building upon a number of studies in the early 1970's which revealed that working class people have experienced 'hidden injuries of class (Howell, 1972; Kahl, 1953; Komarovsky, 1962; Rubin, 1976; Sennett, 1972; Vincent & Ball, 2006, 2008; Vincent & Martin, 2002), it was noted by Gorman (2000) that most

of the hidden injuries were work related. In a medium sized north eastern USA city, Gorman (2000) reported that working class parents had different attitudes to education and life in general to middle class families.

Lower working class parents were less likely to be involved in their children's education and wanted to pass on their life style, as opposed to skilled working class parents who were involved in their children's education and were more aspirational for their children, though not necessarily more knowledgeable about how to achieve such aspirations.

Working class families were more likely to experience barriers to learning such as financial difficulties, lack of information and inspiration. Thus:

‘In an attempt to restore dignity by drawing on culturally valued meanings of success, the resistance to higher education exhibited by parents in this segment of the working class helps solidify their social class position and may ultimately solidify their children's social class position’ (Gorman, 2000:714).

Gorman also suggests that working class mobility aspirations were mainly short range, allowing their children to accomplish their working career ambitions by following alternative ‘blue collar’ - working class - occupations. Such family expectations and values were supported also by the surrounding community and locality and the social interactions that arose.

2.5.1 Class fractions

Social classes usually involve class fractions (social groupings) that possess varying amounts and types of the different forms of capital (social, economic, and cultural) that affect peoples' cultural activities and outlooks (Bourdieu, 1999:127). Social capital, generated through social processes involving social networks (Reay, 2004b:57), is not just about the relationship of different social groupings to the educational system, but also about the centrality of family culture (norms, values and perspectives) to any understanding of cultural reproduction. It is in the family that children initially practice ways of thinking, behaving and types of disposition (Reay, 2004b:57).

The physical environment of the locality too is also a structural factor experienced and interacted with culturally. Class identities involving group and fractional differences thus cannot be removed from social practice. On the basis of this analysis, it is possible to construe the apprentices, employed by a high status employer within the town, as being embryonic members of the aristocracy of labour (skilled manual working class). The college based, and technically unemployed, motor vehicle students, are not members of the aristocracy of labour class fraction, and thus are more likely to value physical labour and masculine defined cultural norms and pursuits to a greater extent than the apprentices. The differences are one of degree, however, not absolutes.

In conclusion, this section on social class fractions has suggested (Beck, 2000; Danermark et al., 2002:56; Vincent & Ball, 2006; R. Williams, 1977:83-89)

that the social structures and processes involved in the existential realities of social class operate via a variety of social forces (such as parental expectations) in ways that simultaneously push and/or constrain the attractions and social costs of possible alternative scenarios and actions perceived by the individual youngsters.

2.6 Aspects of masculinity

It was Simone De Beauvoir who wrote that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1973: 301), thus distinguishing between the biological basis of a 'sex' and social constructions or positioning of 'gender' based roles and identities. Gender refers to the socially constructed and/or conferred roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that any particular society considers appropriate for men and women. Whilst societal definitions of gender roles, such as that of being a man, may be generalised, there are still sufficient variations across societies to emphasise the socially constructed nature of such definitions (Whitehead, 2002). There are variations in concepts of masculinity within social classes too, the two polar forms in the working class being the 'rough' versus 'respectable manhood' (Horowitz, 2001:241; Meyer, 1999), a distinction that was first articulated and recognised during industrialisation (Perkin, 1969).

Traditionally, the 'respectable working class man' is a cultural construction that corresponds to the skilled artisan or craftsman, often termed the aristocracy of labour (Morris, 1988) because of their social status and relatively superior

bargaining position with employers compared to other working men. The other type of manhood, characterised as 'rough', is considered to correspond to the cultural norms (typical ways of behaving and associated sets of beliefs and values) associated with unskilled and semi-skilled workers where masculinity is defined by characteristics such as physical strength, carrying out dangerous work and disorderly/disreputable behaviour. The comparatively poorer (financial and otherwise, such as in health) life experiences and chances of rough working class 'lads' continues for:

'Young men looking for work with only the most basic school leaving qualifications, the restrictive structures of class, gender and ethnicity continue to affect their life chances just as they have done throughout industrial capitalism' (McDowell, 2003:836).

One of the most influential theories about masculinity, and femininity for that matter, was developed by Connell (2005). Connell provided a link between the research field of men's studies (also known as masculinity studies and critical study of men), popular anxieties about men and boys, feminists accounts of patriarchy and sociological models of gender (Connell, 2005:836). Whilst concepts of masculinity have always been sufficiently elastic to maintain hegemony over women, such definitions are always in the process of becoming – of being reaffirmed, rearticulated and potentially modified in the process. This is particularly so with ageing over the lifespan, and for boys, the transition from school and/or college to work (Archer, 2002).

Whilst the students in the two sample categories (apprentices and motor vehicle students) recognise that they have achieved few or no qualifications in

compulsory schooling, their lived reality of masculinity, especially for the motor vehicle students, who do not have the status of an apprenticeship and thus a bone fide 'job', would suggest that, from time to time, they have a need to prove their manhood within their social and cultural context. Most of the time the masculine gender status is just applied as a label and inhabited by men in an unreflexive mode – the reality is just lived. Consequently, such men (and aspiring boys) choose types of jobs that allow them to demonstrate their masculinity in relation to work and how they are considered to be by others. Cars, for instance, are likely to be defined as high status symbols for style, speed, and 'pulling power' – creating an image for (potential) girlfriends.

Jackson (2002) uses the term 'laddishness' to describe the notion of masculinity amongst teenage boys. 'Laddishness is central to the current discourse on boys' 'underachievement', with 'laddish', behaviours being seen by many commentators as an impediment to the achievement of some boys in school, leaving an indelible mark on the final decade of the twentieth century within the UK (Jackson, 2002:37).

Laddishness, embodied in attributes such as procrastination (Covington, 1992), might be considered a self worth protection strategy. Procrastination is the act of putting off till tomorrow what you can do today, or as Jackson describes it, 'putting off work until the last minute (so as) to provide an excuse for failure that deflects attention away from a potential lack of ability' (Jackson, 2002: 42). Indeed, 'procrastination keeps open the possibility that success would have

been possible if only the effort had been applied earlier' (Jackson, 2002:42-43).

The withdrawal of effort and rejection of academic work is not the only explanation for the lads' self perceived masculine identity, for 'disruptive behaviour' is another possible aspect of masculinity, intended to enhance the males' image in front of their peer group as well as enhancing their own self-image. 'Laddishness' behaviour and demeanour thus conjures up a mental picture of:

A young, exclusively male group, and the hedonistic practices popularly associated with such groups for example, 'having a laugh', alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviour, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine (Francis, 1999:357).

Going further back, Paul Willis (1977) makes use of the groups' own label of 'lad' to refer to their group of young white working class boys with anti-schools attitudes. Through such behaviours as those indicated above, the gang reject mental labour (schoolwork) and by rejecting mental labour, are thus 'learning to labour', paving the way for them to (hopefully) obtain working class jobs.

Laddishness, however, can have unintended consequences. Another feature of lads counter school culture is an attitude of superiority to both their teachers and "conformist" students referred to as "ear 'oles". Opposition to dominant school cultures potentially can become opposition to dominant work cultures, despite manual work being seen by the lads as superior to mental – office and/or managerial/supervisory work.

Masculinity, however, is not constructed and reproduced solely through education, or by means of the division of labour, for socialisation in the family and other forms of social interaction such as friendships within localities, are important also.

Youth 'subcultures' and 'differentiated variations of youth culture produced by teenagers within their peer cliques' (Hemmings, 2006:133) can allow young adults to express themselves in ways that build on pre-existing cultural forms, such as new fashion styles. These developmental cultural forms and artefacts constitute 'bricolage' (Levi-Strauss, 1966) - the symbolic reordering and the re-contextualisation of objects to convey new, as well as prior, meanings attached to objects. As Epstein explains:

'The re-contextualization generally takes place at the level of language and style, which cannot be understood intuitively by those outside of the subculture. A subculture will engage in bricolage in order to establish a unique identity and subcultural style and to set the subculture apart from the parent culture' (Epstein, 2002:13).

Language and style are the predominant defining features of youthful subcultures. Most of the 'laddish' behaviours in the classrooms described by Willis (1979), Francis (1999) and Jackson (2002) relate to language behaviour (e.g. swearing) and classroom behaviours (e.g. lounging about, and challenging teachers). These are behaviours typically found in Key Skill classrooms, and are a key for identifying the members of a particular subculture.

2.7 Aspects of locality: Southlakes Town and the Southlakes

Peninsula in the North West of England

The North West of England is the most populated region outside London with approximately seven million people including extensive rural areas. Typically, however:

‘A focus on the North West’s economic structure highlights two distinct zones. The core zone embraces the Lancashire-Cheshire Plain, upon which the historically industrial powerhouses of Greater Manchester and Liverpool are situated. This predominantly urban and industrial zone is complemented by neighbouring coastal towns, of which Blackpool remains the largest and most well known. The second region is dominated by the rural uplands of Cumbria and the Pennines. This peripheral zone retains a largely traditional agricultural economy. Tourism remains a key feature of the Lake District’ (A. Green et al., 2006: 149).

Cumbria, a county known for its rural nature, occupies approximately 50% of the land in the North West region but lacks widespread high skill economic activities where jobs could be created and maintained (Canny, 2004:407).

Within Cumbria, Southlakes Town experiences a geographical isolation being on the seaside edge of the county, and with only one road linking the town with the main M6 motorway. Southlakes Town, however, cannot be considered as a rural community. Instead, Southlakes is working class town within a rural area, being famous for its shipbuilding fabrications.

Despite the long term growth in population, Cumbria remains one of the most sparsely populated counties in England. Within the County, there are substantial variations in population density. Southlakes Town, for example, has

a population density of 13.1 persons per hectare, higher than the county average of 0.7. The social class profile for this area is as follows:

- Professional occupations 3.0
- Managerial and technical 10.7
- Skilled occupations (non-manual) 7.9
- Skilled occupations (manual) 23.8
- Partly skilled occupations 9.1
- Unskilled occupations 2.8
- Retired 26.6
- Other 16.1 (Cumbria County Council, 2000:3)

The wider peninsular area in which the town of Southlakes Town is located currently has a population of approximately 70,000 people, greater than the northwest average. A report prepared by Tom Campbell, the Southlakes Town Borough Council Chief Executive Officer, delivered at Southlakes College in January 2005, mentioned that the population is overwhelmingly white, for ethnic minority groups constitute less than 1% of the total. This town is particularly characterised by higher than average levels of male unemployment, currently standing in 2005 at 5.5%, which is higher than the Cumbrian average of 2.9%, or the then current national average of 3.2%. Campbell concludes that for the college itself, such statistics means that approximately 27% of students are from socially and economically deprived wards within the local area. These areas are predominantly council estates whereas the rest of the students come from estates in which homes are owned by the residents themselves. Given the

industrial nature of Southlakes Town, the statistics above show that manual skilled occupations form the largest grouping. The decline in shipbuilding in the late 1980's saw a workforce reduction in the shipbuilding sector from 16,000 to 4,000 workers to date (2008), and this, allied to geographical isolation, has made this town in the Southlakes Peninsula the 24th most deprived town in England. This index of deprivation aggregates low social class occupations, low levels of skills and knowledge, low levels of income leading to poor housing, diet and health problems. There too are differences in the employment sector in Cumbria compared to that of England as a whole (Lamont & Bullen, 2007:4) with Cumbria relying for its independence upon manufacturing and tourist based employment. The following table shows the percentage breakdown by employment sector:

Employment sector	High/low	% in Cumbria	% in England
Proportion of employees in manufacturing	High	17.2 %	12 %
Proportion of employees in hotels & restaurants	High	9.7%	6.8%
Proportion of employees in real estate & business activities	Low	10 %	16.6%

Table 2: Percentage breakdown by employment sector. Adapted source (Bolton & Hyland, 2003:19) - LSC report (LSC, 2006-2007:9).

In Southlakes Town there has been a sense of pride amongst the local people in relation to the manufacturing of ships and submarines for the last one hundred years. Reduced orders for ships and submarines over a period of some 20

years, with consequent redundancies, has resulted in an outward migration of skilled workers from the town as they seek job opportunities elsewhere (Canny, 2004:408) . Many 16-19 year olds face multiple disadvantages in that they have specific learning needs and are particularly susceptible to unemployment, skills for life deficiencies and social exclusion. Teenage pregnancy is significantly higher than the national average, there being over 2000 lone parents in Southlakes Town Borough (Southlakes College, 2006-2007). Approximately 18,000 local people in the town are on long-term sickness benefit. Unemployment is above county and national averages, and this situation has a bearing on the attitudes of many young people to training such as many on the Level 1 and Foundation Vocational courses that I teach (Southlakes College, 2007-2008).

The vacuum left by the decline in manufacturing jobs has been partially filled by service industry employment (the former Glaxo Ltd., now GlaxoSmithKline Ltd., based in a small town, 10 miles from Southlakes Town, is an example). Skilled jobs in the old manufacturing sector, however, were relatively highly paid, generated greater local purchasing power and better able to support the local economy (Meisenheimer, 1998:22). Work based training, however, is highest in Southlakes Town, which mirrors the high concentration of manufacturing-based companies in the county (Canny, 2004:500). The main employer in the area is a Shipbuilding Company (Northern Engineering Company), with most of the students having family and/or friends working at the Shipyard (Simpson, 2009). Traditional routes to employment are also

reducing. In the late 1980s, the Shipyard recruited around 250 school leavers as apprentices whereas now only 50 to 70 apprentices a year are currently accepted, all of whom must have at least 5 GCSE passes (McQuillan, 2007-2008). In 2004, the proportion of school leavers in the town of Southlakes Town achieving five or more GCSE's at grade C and above was 42.7% compared to the national average which was 53.3% (DfES, 2005).

All the above facts and figures demonstrate the realities of social class in relation to the local area and the research sample's own experiences (Connolly & Healy, 2004:15). In their investigation, Connolly & Healy (2004) drew upon Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic violence' - defined as various modes of social/cultural domination - which represents the way in which working class people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them (ibid p.15). Routine practices come progressively to develop taken for granted ways of thinking and behaving that reflect this lived experience (Connolly & Healy, 2004:16).

The people of Southlakes Town have been influenced by the milieu of the town, with peer pressure and parental influence playing their part in shaping the mindset of young working class lads with regard to remaining in the town, or leaving to seek employment elsewhere. Working class cultural dominance has left a mark on the town of Southlakes and on the people within it.

2.8 Key Skills

Currently, (2009) the Key Skills Support Programme is funded by the Department for Education and Skills. Key Skills can be taken alongside all vocational programmes of study and requires evidence of achievement in Literacy and Numeracy which is assessed against specified criteria. Assessment will be part internal (by developing a portfolio of evidence) and part external (by taking the Adult Numeracy Tests). Key Skills are now recognised (Q.C.A., 1999) as those generic skills that can enable people to perform well in education, training, and life in general. The Key Skills fall into the following categories:

- Literacy (L),
- Numeracy (N) and,
- Information Technology (I.T.).

Each of the Key Skills is available at three levels (1-3). The individual Key Skills are known as Units, each of which has three main sections:

1. What pupils/students need to know and understand (Part A),
2. What must be done to demonstrate the skills and evidence, which must be provided to meet the standards, required (Part B),
3. Guidance and examples of types of evidence (Part C).

Candidates who study Key Skills are required to apply what they know and understand, decide what techniques to use to meet a new challenge, and reflect on their success. In July 2001 the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Estelle Morris, argued that those young people already possessing A* to C GCSE in English, Mathematics and IT need not be required to take the Key Skills qualifications at level 2. This relaxation of the previous position was designed to avoid unnecessary duplication of work, and to encourage young people to move on to higher levels of Key Skills attainment.

Since such overlaps of the curriculum, candidates can claim exemption from parts of the Key Skills programme when they are able to provide proof of achievement of the proxy qualification. Exemptions claimed by proxy qualifications can be made no longer than three years from the date of award to the date of claim for the particular Key Skills qualification, except where students can demonstrate previous knowledge and experiential learning during their initial assessment on applying to the college.

2.8.1 Key Skills and Curriculum Development in Further Education

This section analyses the Key Skills and the Curriculum Development in Further Education in post 16-education provided in research and official reports as well as actions by government and funding agencies such as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The position developed recognises the contentious and contestable nature of Key Skills, including their position in the neoliberal

ideological consensus developed and continually reaffirmed by successive governments since the late 1970s.

The early 1970s experienced a global oil crisis and economic downturn, which in turn was instrumental in the creation of large scale youth unemployment in the UK and a subsequent, and ongoing, articulation of concerns regarding the capacity of such young people to enter and participate productively in relevant labour markets (Abbott, 1997:627; Haywood & James, 2004). At the same time, the so-called post-fordist development of capitalism and the quality movement led to additional concerns over the working capacities of young workers, for an increasing emphasis was placed upon flexible working patterns as well as workers being able and willing to move within and across jobs (Brown & Scase, 1994; Goffee & Scase, 1995), and thus shoulder greater amounts of personal risk (Beck, 1992, 2000).

These concerns for the supply of suitably qualified and able workers manifested themselves in a number of developments, including the establishment of National Education and Training Targets (NETTs) (DfES, 2003b). The Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2003a), asserted that ‘by 2010 young people and adults in England will have knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world’ (ibid p. 43); and that young adults should be equipped ‘with essential skills, knowledge and personal qualities’ (ibid p. 41), which people need in order to ‘function effectively as members of a flexible, adaptable and competitive workforce’ (ibid p. 44). The ideological dominance

of the concept of a flexible workforce is a relatively recent phenomenon dating from the 1980s (Allen & Henry, 2005:181). The related development of the 'quality revolution' (McKnight, et al., 2005; Wagner, 1997) suggested that the skill gap, as measured by qualifications, between the United Kingdom and competitor countries is most severe at intermediate levels, which includes craft, technician and professional occupations (Steedman & Green, 1997).

Vocational education commentators have suggested, consequently, that 'all levels of education and training (i.e. learning) policy exemplify a new capitalist state formation' (Ainley, 2004:497); promoting workers who have the wherewithal (skills and motivations) to move across jobs, learning and relearning as their job changes – hence the development of the concept and content of what has become known as Key Skills. Theorists (Avis, 2004, 2006; Sheehan, 2004; Worth, 2002) analyse Key Skills as an ideological manifestation of the related changes in capitalism, and one that uses a particular Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971) such as the education and training system to attempt to instil that flexibility in the workforce. As this new 'life-long learning' culture seeks to destroy old concepts of jobs (Crowther, 2004; Hodgkinson & Bloomer, 2002; Mills, 2002), and thus repudiate the history, culture and traditional ways of understanding of workers within longstanding firms as well as traditional areas, it is not surprising that workers (or potential workers as students) cannot understand and/or accept why they have to do Key Skills as part of their education and training (Abbott, 1997; Moreland, 2009).

The Labour Government elected in 1997 confirmed this ideological sea change by suggesting that the main priorities of the newly elected Government were ‘Education, Education, Education’ (Fairclough, 2000, 2003a). Curriculum 2000 (DfEE, 2000) confirmed the necessity to provide further education opportunities for those young people who, at 16+, were characterised as lacking basic skills, including Literacy and Numeracy.

The Curriculum 2000 framework supported the development of Key Skills, defined as Communication (C.), Application of Number (A.O.N.) and Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T.) (Dench, et al., 1998).

Employers were to be encouraged to recognise the value of such Key Skills, though Keep (2000) suggested that employers do not know in any detail what skills they do want, so that:

‘We need to be very cautious about using qualifications as the main or indeed sole proxy for skill, or for employers’ training efforts or levels of investment. It is clear many employers do not share the passion for qualifications that is a hallmark of national policymakers thinking about VET (Vocational Education and Training) (Keep, 2000:7).

Given the suggestion by Keep that employers do not know what skills are desirable and even if students have the desirable skills, employers are placed under no obligation to employ them. Consequently, logic suggests that, contrary to government policy, employers should neither be involved in course design nor decide what people should do within the educational context.

2.8.2 The Curriculum and Key Skills models in Further Education

The word 'curriculum' was derived from the Latin *currere* meaning 'to run' and the word 'curriculum' meant 'course' in a racing context. According to McKimm (2003):

'One of the functions of a curriculum is to provide a template or design which enables learning to take place. Curricula usually define the learning that is expected to take place during a course or programme of study in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, they should specify the main teaching, learning and assessment methods and provide an indication of the learning resources required to support the effective delivery of the course' (McKimm, 2003:2).

McKimm goes on to say that:

'The curriculum that is written and published, for example as course documentation, is the official or formal curriculum. The aim of educational development is to ensure that the official curriculum is delivered as the functional curriculum and there is not a mismatch as development turns into implementation. The official curriculum can also be distinguished from the hidden, unofficial or counter curriculum' (McKimm, 2003:2).

A hidden curriculum describes those aspects of the educational environment and student learning (such as values and expectations that students acquire as a result of going through an educational process) that are not formally or explicitly stated but which relate to the culture and ethos of an organisation. This highlights that 'the process of learning is as important as its product and as teachers we need to be aware of both the formal and informal factors which impact on learning' (McKimm, 2003:2).

As I interpret the curriculum issues of Key Skills at Southlakes College, I am able to draw links from theory to practice and useful justifications provided by

(Bolton & Hyland, 2003) following designed interviews with 41 practitioners teaching on General National Vocational Qualification (G.N.V.Q.) Advanced Business Studies programmes in seven institutions. In their investigation Bolton and Hyland look at teacher perceptions about Key Skills. The analysis of the transcripts in Bolton & Hyland's research shows that teachers consistently viewed Key Skills in one of five ways, conceptualised as:

- 1) Remedial Skills so as 'to do what schools have failed to do',
- 2) Vocational Skills, especially skills that were required by employers,
- 3) Appropriate Workplace Attitudes, central to developing within students the work attitudes required by employers,
- 4) Study Skills, considered essential to being a successful student i.e. looking for information, analysing it and presenting their results and,
- 5) Life Long Learning Skills consisting of aptitudes appropriate to learning across the lifespan, including college and progression into higher education, work and life in general (ibid pp. 20-21).

Related to this range of Key Skill intentions, alternative curriculum models can be proposed for Southlakes College for the insertion of Key Skills into the vocational curriculum, such as the embedded, integrated and bolt-on curriculum models (Chadha, 2006:20-21). Theorists (Barnett, 1994; Chadha, 2006; P. Green & Webb, 1997) also recognise issues of definition, for although there have been definitions of the word skills in government sponsored reports such as (Dearing, 1996, 1997; DfEE, 1998a, 2000; DfES, 2001, 2003b, 2005) 'we

cannot teach skills as such; we have to specify the skill we have in mind’ (Barnett, 1994:56). The paper by Chadha (2006) presents alternative models of curriculum development that could be introduced at Southlakes College in order to make the mode of skills transfer more effective. It is argued by Chadha that:

‘Our ability to contextualise skills is as important as the skills themselves, and more often than not transferable skills are presented as those which are learnt in education and applied to employment’ (Chadha, 2006:19).

In order for the students at Southlakes College to develop these academic skills (Communication, Application of Number and Information Communication Technology) vocational teachers may need to have the academic expertise in teaching and assessing skills successfully if embedded or integrated curriculum models are implemented. The three approaches or teaching strategies used by Chadha in developing skills transfer are:

- 1) Embedding: the emphasis on promoting the development of technical ‘know-how’.

An example of implementation of embedded skills could be design projects involving team work, and possibly peer observation and peer review. In this model, even though skills development becomes explicit, students may often fail to grasp the academic value of such an approach.

- 2) Integrating skills components: skills are taught within the core subject and the same amount of emphasis is placed on the development of transferable skills as technical abilities.

An example of integrated skills are student-led workshops in which students are assessed on both their professional knowledge and transferable skills (ibid p.21-22). This curriculum model approach to teaching transferable skills suggested is potentially available over four different levels. These levels are:

1. Level 1: refers to an embedded approach especially for those students who tend to concentrate on the know-how and the assessment criteria related instead of developing their skills.
2. Level 2: proposes bolting-on teaching approach in developing students skills in which they (students) are taught to review and reflect upon their progress of skills already learned though the explicit nature of such development.
3. Level P (Product): suggests work-based learning in which students can apply their subject knowledge and the development of skills transfer through assimilation, adaptation and reflection.

4. Level 3: offers an integrated approach to teaching skills with a greater student ability to critically self evaluate the skills already learned, reflect and use them to further develop students' skills.

It is suggested by Chadha that, in order for students to develop effective skills, including those vocational students at Southlakes College, opportunities should be in place for them to practice these skills with appropriate guidance and support. There are a number of critical analyses of the concept of skills transfer (Barnett, 1994; Wolf, 2002) that potentially link with Chadha's models (Bennett, et al., 2000; Bridges, 1993; Gubbay, 1994). Barthorpe & Hall, 2000, for instance, discuss an innovative and collaborative placement and careers preparation programme to students in higher education, though Drummond et al., (1998) suggest that efforts to promote more successful approaches to personal transferable skills development in higher education have met with variable but generally limited success. According to Drummond et al., the problem is not related to the understanding of what constitutes good practice in teaching and learning skills but in the difficulties in establishing good practice models of curriculum for teaching skills transfer.

2.9 Conclusions

This chapter has examined biographical accounts and described four perspectives (Social Class, Locality, Masculinities and Key Skills and curriculum developments) which have a direct reference to my investigation.

It was important to explore these four aspects because of the emphasis placed on the individual students in the case study in the attempt to understand their interpretations and constructions of their perspectives on education and in particular Key Skills. In the light of the literature review, the current model of Key Skills (a bolt-on model) appears not to make possible the achievement for all vocational students. A 'bolt-on' model is not fully inclusive as 'one size does not fit all'. Consequently, in my view, the Key Skills department at Southlakes College needs to be more proactive in ensuring that the learning needs of all students are met.

In order to research the perspectives of those first year engineering students at Southlakes College, the next chapter outlines the theory underpinning the research as well as the methodological approach taken. The next chapter also outlines the background, construction and types of biographical case studies in order to discover students' own perceptions about education and work. Chapter Three also describes the participants – the students and Coordinators (past and present) of Key Skills – involved in through focus groups and personal interviews. Chapter 3 also includes a sample of analysis of data as a prelude to the data presentation and analysis in succeeding chapters.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the research development and theoretical conceptual framework of my research. In order to accomplish this I will explain the ontological and epistemological stance that underpinned the research as well as the research methods that were utilised in this investigation. The chapter also describes the participants - students and Coordinators of Key Skills - taking part in this research and explains the management of the biographical focus groups and personal interviews. This chapter also includes a sample of the analysis of data in relation to students' attitudes to Key Skills obtained from question 6a (see Annex A3) from both of the focus groups: motor vehicle and apprentices in engineering. This chapter concludes with ethical issues which have been taken into consideration throughout the research.

3.2 Background of research

The research is a qualitative case study which aims to analyse situations from the participants' point of view. I initially began with some reasonably fixed ideas about my research design, but as the research became more focused, I had to re-conceptualise my initial ideas and methodological approach. My research questions guiding the study were:

Q1: What have been, and are, the biographical experiences most influential in causing the students to develop their current expressed work and life perspectives?

Q2: What is the extent and nature of students understanding of Key Skills in Further Education in relation to seeking and obtaining work, (nationally, regionally, and locally)?

To respond effectively to these research questions, four aspects (Social Class, Locality, Masculinities and Key Skills) from the literature have been described and discussed in the previous Chapter to provide a base to my investigation.

3.2.1 The nature of reality and empirical assumptions

The students who are at the heart of this research are in their first year of full-time vocational education and on the threshold (hopefully) of a worthwhile and fulfilling working life. Whilst the students will have made decisions about their own futures, derived from a number of knowledge sources (Fairclough, 2000:259; 2003b; A. Green & Homenidou, 2006), it is highly unlikely that they will have sought out labour market information relevant to themselves and their work situations. Others have compiled such information, so that, for instance:

‘For all the broad sectors where employment growth is projected over the period to 2014, the rate of increase is less favourable in the North West than the projected average gains for the UK. In absolute terms, the expected loss of 50 thousand manufacturing jobs is the largest employment loss projected for any region bar the West Midlands’ (A. Green et al., 2006: 216).

It will not be lost upon readers that the forecast above pinpoints a significant loss in manufacturing jobs within the North West region of England over the next four years. If true, this trend occurs at precisely the same time that the

students in the research sample have chosen manufacturing work futures in the form of ship-building engineering and motor vehicle engineering. It is possible that each individual student, should they know about employment trends, might rationalize this situation by assuming personal superiority, and the private shouldering of responsibility as an acceptable risk (Beck, 2000). Overall, however, based upon my personal experience, the students remain ignorant of those wider trends and movements in the job markets of the North West, which include the observation that:

‘The North West is projected to suffer job losses in administrative, clerical & secretarial occupations, skilled trades’ occupations, machine & transport operatives and elementary occupations. All other occupations are expected to see job gains’(A. Green et al., 2006: 149).

Because of this mismatch between student aspirations and job market realities, the research is best achieved by the application of a realist concept of society and research. Realism suggests that there are underlying realities (by which we mean social structures and social processes/mechanisms) that exist independently of individuals and groups who live within that society, and which have effects, with varying degrees of directness, upon those same individuals and groups (Danermark, et al., 2002: 58). It thus may well be that the students’ perceptions of jobs within the local labour markets are at odds with the realities about job change and the move away from engineering Working Futures (DfES, 2003-2004:4).

3.2.2 Ontology and Critical Realism

It is not the intention to go into great depth about critical realism in this thesis, but, according to my reading, critical realism was developed as a counterpoint to both Positivism (the belief that the natural sciences provide the only true scientific knowledge) (Bhaskar, 1979:2) and Hermeneutics (the necessity for understanding reality from somebody else's point of view and factors that may influence these views). It is argued by Bhaskar that the social sciences aim to clarify or explain the meaning of social events, and therefore society cannot be studied using a naturalist methodology. Bhaskar believes that 'the conceptual categories that we use to identify and understand social events are not exogenously determined; rather that these categories are socially and historically determined (Ardebili, 2001). It is the role of social science, and researchers, to study such realities (such as those of the Key Skills students) as empathetically as possible, and by doing so, seek to identify, explain and understand the underlying, and often invisible social structures and processes (e.g. social class) that give rise to, and continual succour to, such fractured views of realities.

Realism is not a determinist approach, however, for it is suggested by Danermark et al., that 'people's actions are never determined by a certain structure; they are merely conditioned' (ibid. 56). Every day experiences 'may temporarily be modified by other mechanisms' (ibid. 57). Consequently, 'tendencies are transfactual' working independently of the actual outcome, and

experientially separated from the factual events. It is suggested by Sayer (1992) that realist researchers distinguish between:

- Events (surface phenomena that we actually perceive and/or experience),
- Mechanisms (underlying social processes such as employment trends) and,
- Structures (established and relatively stable - in the short term at least -) social groupings and relationships such as social classes, race, gender, cultures and subcultures) (Sayer, 1992: 117).

This research works with the above distinctions, paying particular attention to the role that language, primarily through discourses, plays in structuring societal member's experiences and perceptions of them. As we all view events from our own vantage points (though influenced by others, and social processes such as cultural norms and traditions), it is not surprising that such views, precisely because of our particular vantage points, are fractured, and contain and/or accept perspectives upon reality that may be untenable (capable of being proven wrong).

As well as identifying the causes of events, Sayer (1992: 111) points out that 'explanations must include references to the necessary conditions for the existence of mechanisms, where we do not already know them'. Sayer, for

instance, notes with regard to 'macho' images' (as of the 'lads' in Key Skills) that:

'The reasons given by actors for their actions may not always be the real reasons; men who cultivate a macho image may not be aware of it let alone know the reasons for their actions. Indeed, if they were made aware of the point of critical social science's attempt to reduce illusion in society is to change its effects, not merely to provide an academic (original emphasised) critique of an external description of society'(Sayer, 1992:111).

Sayer suggests that the causes for different actions such as studying, shopping, joining the army or being polite 'presuppose conditions such as material resources and social structure, including the conventions, rules and systems of meaning in terms of which reasons are formulated' (ibid p.111).

The awareness of social reality and how we are able to transform society is a complex issue which relates to the very heart of the nature of reality and consequently the students' understandings and self reflection of the outside world and how they view the same. One of the key constituting elements of reality is language, and so are the forms of analysis that constitute discourse analysis.

3.3 Discourse analysis as a research tool

The main analytic approach of my research is the utilization of discourse analysis, which is a form of study of the spoken and written word that comprises my raw data. This is important to me for the purpose of my research as discourse analysis is described as (Budd & Douglas, 1996; Fairclough, 1992,

2000, 2003a; Frohmann, 1992; Jameson, 1991) the application of critical analysis to social situations and revealing of hidden, or not, interpretations of reality seen by the participants.

Usher (1998) suggests that research subjects, as they talk and interact, reconfigure their dispositions, thus (in effect) rewriting their own history, their sense of their previous life. Respondents are poised between past and future events (Bowles & Gintis, 1976:129; McDowell, 2003:836; Usher, 1988:131). History does not simply relate to the past but to the future, or in other words the 'reorganisation of the past goes hand in hand with an anticipation of the future' (Usher, 1988:23). Based on all these assumptions, discourse analysis is concerned with students' narratives of their current actions and perspectives, which in turn create the background of, and the complex processes for, an examination of meaningfulness in their social life.

3.4 The analysis of language discourse: A reflective approach

Leading on from the above, the participants' experiences should be seen as the starting point of scientific inquiry but 'must go beyond the microscopic and anecdotal, being aware that people's lived experiences are dialectically linked to the social relations of the society in which these people are located' (Raissiguier, 1994:7). Smith (1987) in Raissiguier (1994) argues that:

'Locating the knower in the everyday world and constituting our inquiry in terms of the problematic arising from how it is organized in a social process, enables us to see the 'micro' and the 'macro' sociological levels in a determinate relation' (Smith, 1987:99) in (Raissiguier, 1994:7).

This suggests that, whilst identity may be conceptualized within large collective social identities such as class, race and gender, these elements can work together in an unexpected and subtle way.

The transcripts consequently were assessed in such a way that it would allow me to construct reality by capturing the past and positioning the new, in order to generate accounts that are meaningfully constructed.

In the case of the motor vehicle group, for instance, the students have articulated in their speech that they want to be working with their hands and had no fixed idea of what to expect on enrolling at college; whereas the group of apprentice students are working towards a career in the shipbuilding industry and tend to accept more than the motor vehicle students that theory lessons including Key Skills are also part of their apprenticeship course.

Motor vehicle students expect that the college training will comprise solely of hands-on training with a certain amount of theory. Consequently, the students seemed surprised, disappointed, and resentful even, when faced with the prospect of having to do Key Skills as well, hence their more hostile attitude.

3.5 Background of biographical method

As this research uses biographical case studies, it is important to understand what is meant by that term in this context. Biographical case studies seek to illuminate the ways students create, sustain or change their perspectives, including their perspectives on educational and/or social situations and their subjective perceptions about education and work.

In doing so, I argue that the emphasis upon subjective realities is particularly important as employment is highly competitive because large companies in Cumbria are only selecting highly qualified people, whereas low skilled individuals (Entry Levels and Level 1 attainment) are being marginalized with less opportunity than other groups in finding well paid jobs in the area or even a trade/career in larger companies.

In this thesis, the biographical analysis elicits and critically reviews the explanation of the world as the students perceive it. The location and nature of this investigation builds upon the work of Denzin (1989) who separates peoples' experiences and knowledge into three categories:

- 1- Subjective knowing involves drawing on personal experience in an effort to form an understanding and interpretation of a particular phenomenon.

- 2- Objective knowing presupposes that a person can stand outside peoples' experiences and understand them, independent of the person experiencing the phenomenon in question.
- 3- Inter-subjective knowing engages on shared experiences and the knowledge gained from having participated in a common experience with another person (Denzin, 1989:27).

These three types of knowledge are important for my investigation. The second type of knowledge, however, refers to a particular level of thinking difficult for people who are concrete thinkers, which many of the participants in the Motor Vehicle group and some of the Engineer apprentices will be.

Consequently, these students may find difficult the capacity to 'stand outside oneself'. Concrete thinkers cannot be removed from the present situation and specific thoughts, whereas abstract thinkers are people capable of modifying their thoughts and desires (Bottero & Irwin, 2003:470; McInerney, 2006; Piaget, 1972; Sternberg & Leighton, 2004) even when they are convinced that they cannot or do not want to do so.

I am conscious, however, that in my biographical case studies, realistically, it is far more likely that students' types of knowledge might be 1- subjective knowledge and 3 - the inter-subjective. Most of my biographical interviews will fall into the realm of subjective knowledge.

Asking questions about students' educational background, for instance, will allow me to be able to draw out some implications that occurs as a result of the influence of family and friends, which will involve issues about social class and gender, for as Denzin (1989) suggests:

‘The interpretation of this knowledge, the act of interpreting and making sense out of something, creates the conditions for understanding, which involves being able to grasp the meanings of an interpreted experience for another individual’ (Denzin, 1989:28).

Consequently, this investigation presumes that students have ‘a life that has been lived or a life that can be studied, constructed, reconstructed and written about’ (ibid 28).

3.5.1 Constructing biographical case studies

The small-scale biographical case studies envisaged three stages. The three stages of Biographical Case Studies diagram are as follows below:

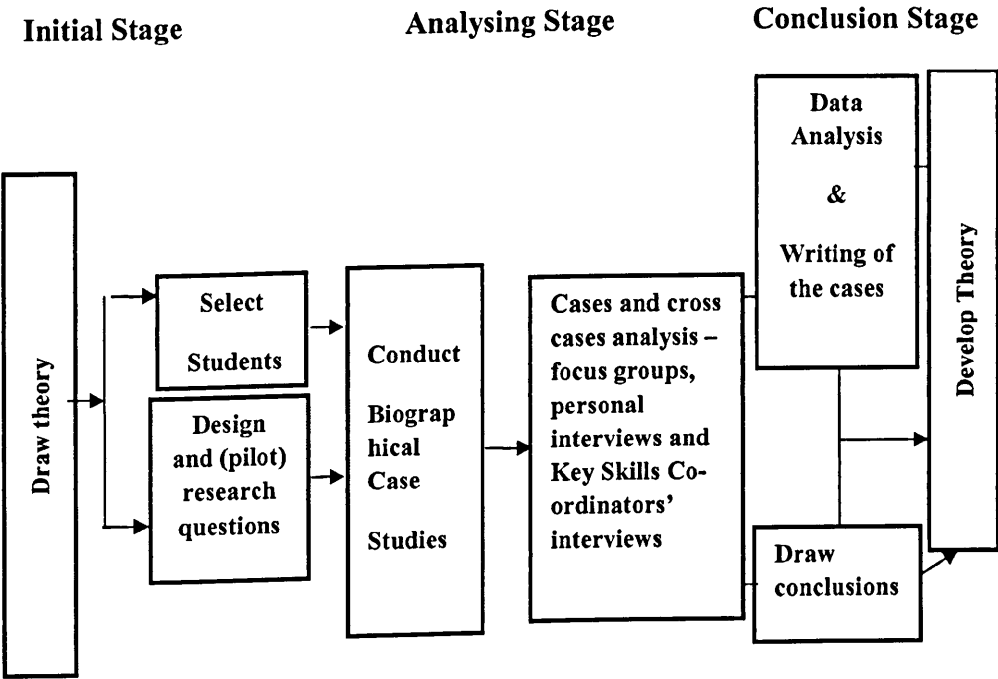


Figure 1: The three stages of Biographical Case Studies

The first stage was the process in which an extensive literature research - theoretical framework - on biographical case studies was carried out. The second stage refers to the biographical case studies per se, data analysis and writing of the cases. The themes to be investigated were primarily developed in the form of statements, and sub themes or questions were also discussed. The third stage refers to the analysis and development of conclusions of the biographical case studies. This third stage involved the interpretation of the outcome of students' accounts, analysis of biographical case studies and writing

the biographical case reports. It was intended that the biographical case studies would refer back to previous literature research in an attempt to locate this investigation into the general picture in order to fit in with the conceptual background of this study which, indeed, was the case.

The concept of biographical studies is well summarised by Bertaux & Delcroix (2000) as for 'The life history (or 'biography') is':

'The case history of one person, where the person is the centre: their life story, their own narrative and evaluative account of their life and life experiences as told to an interviewer, puts them at the centre point of the picture. But few individuals live alone as isolated atoms... All of them become embedded in nets of strong, reciprocal commitments and feelings; their actions, life decisions, life paths interact with each other; kinship, juridical, moral and other kinds of bonds relate them to each other. Whilst granting that what counts most are not formal kinship ties, but 'lived' ones, it remains that most people are connected most of their life with some 'significant others' by bonds of reciprocal dependence and moral solidarity..... the focus on a family rather than on an individual immediately sets within the field of observation, and at its very centre, not an individual but relations, which are at the same time interpersonal relations and socio-structural relationships' (Bertaux & Delcroix, 2000: 73-74).

3.5.2 The significance of biographical case studies to my research

In order to understand the significance of Biographical Case Studies, it is necessary to understand also the concept of determination (often paired with its conceptual polar opposite of 'free-will'). This research acknowledges a concept of determinism that allows for some freedom of action, but also recognises that people do so in situations that we have little or any control over (I can feel free, for instance, to catch a train, but have to do so at times that the rail company decides that trains will run). A way out of this is to take the

position of Williams, R (1977: 87), who conceptualises determination as both the ‘setting of limits’, but also the ‘exertion of pressures on individuals. Limits can be established through interactions with family and peers (‘my family did not value education’) and their related cultural norms and perspectives that can be experienced as ‘pressures to conform’ (e.g. attitudes towards Key Skills and educational achievement). Individuals can still ignore such limits or pressures, but to do so is often at some cost to them (e.g. isolation or ostracism).

3.6 Positioning Theory

In this investigation, positioning theory is used to explore the relationship between discourses and how people position and reposition themselves, including identities, through the use of language, (Harré & Davies, 1990; Harré & L. van Langenhove, 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1987) and by others in different situations, relations and in different contexts, such as in education. By ‘having assumed a particular position, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position in terms of certain images, metaphors, and story lines and concepts, also known as ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Krolókke & Sørensen, 2006:57). Within social sciences (Harré & L. van Langenhove, 1999:2) ‘the concepts of ‘position’ and ‘positioning’ were introduced by Hollway (1984) in her analysis of the construction of subjectivity in the area of heterosexual relations’ (p. 16). Holloway subsequently explains the difference between positioning oneself and taking up positions through discourses:

‘Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people. Like the subjects and objects of sentences... women and men are

placed in relation to each other through the meaning which a particular discourse makes available' (Hollway, 1984:236).

The analysis of the focus groups' contributions below suggest that people's identities are constructed through language, therefore students' position themselves in different ways by articulating their schooling, past experiences, and influences in the learning process. It is noted by Harré (1997) that, during conversational interactions, people use storylines to make their words and actions meaningful to themselves and others. The need often for a joint construction means that positioning theory can help to illuminate issues of power:

'The meanings of a person's actions are the acts they are used to perform. But those acts come into being only in so far as they are taken as such by conversational partners. ... I don't and indeed can't decide what my actions mean. Only you and I can do that. The investigation of the devices by which some people can manage to get you to give my meaning to what both of us say and do is the study of power' (Harré, 1997:182).

In the event that a stance (position) is assigned, actors might 'acquiesce in such an assignment, contest it or subvert it' (Harré & L.van Langenhove, 1999:2). Barnes (2004) notes too that:

'A key aspect of positioning theory is the rights and duties associated with a position. Being positioned in a certain way carries obligations or expectations about how one should behave, or constraints on what one may meaningfully say or do. Positions may also carry rights, such as the right to be heard, or the right to be taken seriously' (Barnes, 2004:2).

Social psychological processes such as 'groupthink' may lead individuals to take a position within a group that may be different to what they believe privately. This is the situation of 'private opinions and public utterances as a

hidden profile' (Henningesen, et al., 2006:43). One such example in the focus groups is the declared intentions of most of the students to move away from the town in which they and their families reside. In a group thinking scenario, students may be under pressure to take the position of the common consent (i.e. in the focus groups most students agreed that they would look for job opportunities in other areas away from their local town) but, in reality, doubts emerge in the discussion as to whether students are prepared to leave the town to look for alternative employment or stay where their family and friends reside. Discourse as 'social practice' (Winslade, Monk, & Cotter, 1999:502) also implies that people position themselves through language, for:

'If language is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, then language also determines how we perceive possibilities of change. Language in this sense consists of a range of discourses which offer different versions of the meaning of social relations and their effects upon the individual'(Weedon, 1997:86).

Additionally, people's stance and/or attitude on any given topic is dependant to a large degree on his/her cultural and/or social background.

3.7 Methods of research I: Focus groups and personal interviews

Focus groups are a form of group interview based upon a predetermined series of questions. The group members then utilise group processes, such as other people's words setting off new trains of thoughts in other group members, to provide a range of responses to the questions. Focus groups thus allow respondents to communicate with each other as well as with the interviewer.

One of the aims of focus group is to generate discussion rather than engage in question and response sequences. There, of course, is a danger individual participants may dominate the group responses; similarly participants may digress to unrelated issues. There, nonetheless, seem to be many more advantages than disadvantages in using focus groups. Focus groups, for instance, 'maximises possibilities for unanticipated but highly pertinent matters being raised as respondents 'bounce off' of each others' comments and claims' (Hopkins, 1993:124; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004:208).

3.7.1 Participants in the focus group

Focus groups were carried out with the selected groups of students, the data being gathered in natural settings such as students' classroom to minimise disruption. The two focus groups each involved eight learners. One group were studying an N.V.Q. (National Vocational Qualification) Level 1 in Motor Vehicle full time, whilst Group two involved eight apprentices following N.V.Q. (National Vocational Qualification) Level 2. Both groups were in their first year of study. Following an initial assessment in September 2006, the results indicated that the Motor Vehicle students needed to improve their numeracy, reading and writing skills. Consequently, this particular focus group were working towards Level 1, equivalent to GCSE, D to G grade. The apprentices, after the initial assessment, were grouped to study Levels 2 Communication and Application of Number, despite there being no funding in place to provide support for the apprentices. At the time of data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the research and asked for their

agreement to tape-record the discussion topic to make it easier for me to transcribe. In addition I explained that all information gathered in the discussion would be confidential, for:

‘One should try to give people a measure of control over one’s access to their activities and views, and over the extent to which the information one gathers should be released to others; the key concepts here are confidentiality, negotiation and control’ (Elliot, 1991:75).

Consequently, pseudonyms are throughout this research, with the information kept secure and personal information be passed to other individuals. Prior to the start of the focus groups, I asked them to give their names and age.

3.8 Management of focus groups

Although the focus groups were carried out in their ‘natural’ setting, I hoped to distinguish in the students’ minds a separation between their interaction with me as a ‘teacher’ and that of a ‘researcher’. Since the focus groups were chosen at random and students volunteered to take part in the research, their success would depend in part ‘on the dynamics between individuals within that particular group’ (Bloor, 2001:36). The focus group sessions took the form of a conversation in which ‘questions were interspersed at appropriate moments’ (Fetterman, 1988:49).

3.9 Methods of Data Collection II: The student biographical interviews

The biographical interviews with students were carried out at the end of their first year of study. There are two major reasons for this.

The first is the desire to see what changes - if any - had occurred in the students' perspectives over the duration of their first year experiential of college and Key Skills. Secondly, the questions sought perspectives about their futures and the impact of those futures upon their current attitudes towards work, labour markets. Such perspectives may have been treated in the abstract in the first year interviews and focus groups, but now have an added experiential base as they prepare to move onto the second and final year of their courses at college for future labour market or their apprenticeship development to Level 3.

Six respondents volunteered to participate in the personal interviews (three motor vehicle students and three engineering apprentices). The interview themes shown below were designed to elicit students' perspectives in that theme. The interview themes were:

1. - Home circumstances and perspectives
2. - Family occupations
3. - Family achievement in education to date
4. - How did students get to where they are: course/career path
5. - Students attitudes and experiences in education
6. - Students' future occupations and skills
7. - Students perceptions of Key Skills

The questions were designed to allow students to draw from experience in order for them to reflect, summarise and evaluate their past experiences and their views on themselves as learners and future workers.

The interviews took the form of a conversation where questions were asked at appropriate moments. The attempt was made to use the type of conversation and tone of voice in which the respondent felt at ease in a quiet and relaxing atmosphere. The questions and responses were written up following the tape recordings, augmented by comments in shorthand writing during the interview.

3.10 Methods of Data Collection III: Key Skills Coordinators interviews

My research design enabled me to triangulate the outcomes of the focus groups and personal students' interviews, for three members of the Key Skills staff - past and present Coordinators of Key Skills - were asked to contribute to this investigation. I provided general information about the nature of the research and asked the participants if they were willing to give their views and to allow these views to be included in my thesis. Two of the staff (past Coordinators of Key Skills) gave face to face interviews lasting approximately one hour each and were conducted in a private room at the College. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed soon after the meetings into a readable format including my own notes. The present Coordinator of Key Skills declined a verbal interview but agreed to provide her views in writing. Following transcription, the data was analysed using the qualitative research method already applied to students' interviews. My first step was to organise common themes or 'chunks' emerging from the answers supplied by the three Coordinators of Key Skills. The second step, where appropriate, was to combine the results of the answers of the three Coordinators into similar ideas

or views with regard to the organisation, implementation and student and staff attitudes towards of Key Skills. The third step was to summarise common themes and views and draw conclusions from what participants had said along with any ‘underlying views’, particularly the similarities and differences from the three sets of answers. The data findings of the interviews of the Key Skills staff are analysed and commented on in Chapter 5.

3.11 A structured approach to analysis

The model of data analysis chosen is shown below (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003: 43). This qualitative data analysis model contains three clear phases. These phases are:

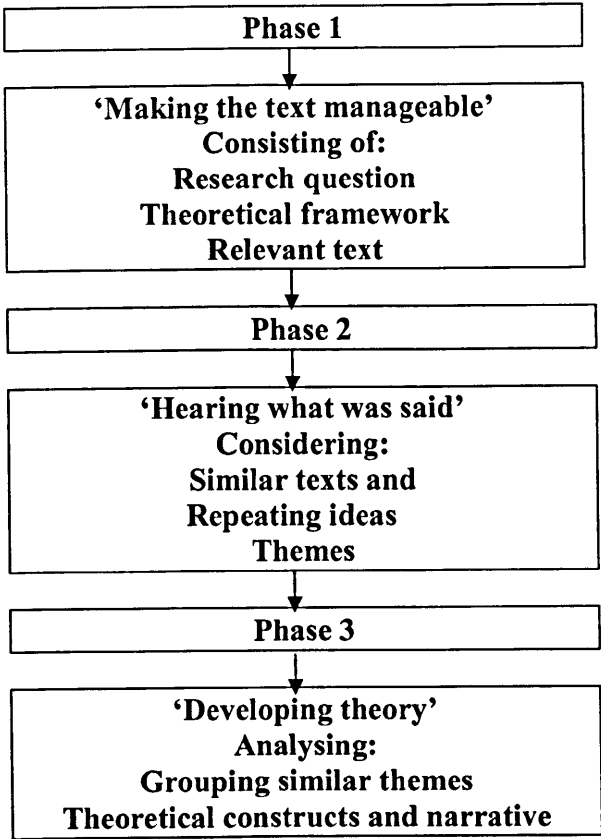


Figure 2: Structured research approach.
Adapted source (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003:43)

Although the method of data analysis presents the analytic process in linear form, in reality for me it was a repetitive process involving overlaps together with backwards-forward feedback. Once the research questions have been stated, the theoretical framework could guide and assess the research. The first phase of the model consequently is described as the 'filtering process' (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003:42). This process enables the researcher to select which sections of the text are to be included for analysis and which sections will be discarded, based upon the research concerns and the theoretical framework.

Under Phase 2, themes are constructed with underlying ideas or repeating topics emerging from the storyline. The identification and basis of opinions, ideas or feelings is a complex task because the same question can be responded to in many different ways. An analogy about the process for analysing qualitative data is drawn by Krueger & Casey (2000):

'The analysis process is like detective work. One looks for clues, but in this case the clues are trends and patterns that reappear among various focus groups. The researcher's task is to prepare a statement about what was found, a statement that emerges from and is supported by available evidence. The researcher must identify those opinions, ideas, or feelings that repeat, even though they are expressed in different words and styles' (Krueger & Casey, 2000:6).

Any analysis, however, needs to draw upon underlying realities such as social structures (social class), processes such as socialisation into discourses and ideologies (e.g. masculinities) and the processes associated with positioning. Thus, one of the methods utilised for the analysis of the focus groups, was to

compare what was said and identify what feelings or ideas were coincidental, even though they were expressed differently. A further aspect to consider is the consistency of opinions. Although individual participants' accounts may contradict themselves or even defend ideas that differ from those exposed earlier, the analysis should take into account those ideas that appear repeatedly during the speech.

The third phase, that of developing theory, requires any themes to be related to the theoretical framework of the research. This third phase requires knowledge and reflection of relevant literature and prior research in order to build a theoretical narrative of people's personal constructs and experiences.

3.12 Analysis of data: an example of a transcript in relation to students' attitudes towards Key Skills

To demonstrate the analysis in action, an example is provided below in relation to students' attitudes towards Key Skills obtained from question 6a (Annex A3) of both focus groups. My starting point was to collate repetitive words or phrases by making notes on the page margins using colour coding for each repetitive words or ideas. Doing this allows for, 'dramatic reconstructions of social reality (that) can help to promote contested and multiple versions of reality while presenting them in a readable format' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996:127 My word in brackets). Throughout the focus groups and personal interviews, students were encouraged to present their version of reality by

talking about life experiences within the educational context. The transcript conventions were used during the analysis of the interviews.

Image	Meaning
(.) pause.	i.e. a few seconds silence
(2)	Timed pause in seconds
Sto.	Full stop indicates unfinished word
[inaud talks]	Indicates speech that can't be deciphered at all
//.....//	Indicates overlapping – use for both speakers and place one overlap directly underneath the other
...	Sentence appeared not to be finished
Underlined	Indicates ' <u>repeating patterns of ideas</u> ' in order to create a theme.
(A.Q.)	Apprentices Question x
(M.V. Q.)	Motor Vehicle Question x

Table 3: Transcript Conventions created by Viviana Hopkinson.

Below is one example from a full transcript of the two groups, NVQ2

Apprenticeship students year 1 and NVQ1 Motor Vehicle students year 1, in relation to students' attitudes towards Key Skills. The engineering apprentices comment:

Question: What about Key Skills as part of your experiences? Do you think you need them? (Q. 6a).

[inaud talks]

Gary: I'd say you may have to do it but I wouldn't compare it with what you do at the workshop, because the stuff we do in Key Skills is the same as what we did in school... what we learn in here we have already done it... so we already have the experience but what we do in the workshop is different... it's new every day...

Euan: Key Skills itself is essential but I wouldn't say it's that important... because I did really well in school I didn't need to do any exams... I got my GSCE's C and above... all of them I completed my work quite quickly... unlike other people

[inaud talks]

Oliver: // Well like I said, in Key Skills you are gaining more knowledge so yeah I think it's good... but you shouldn't have to do it if you got the grades already... only if you need to boost your grades up I think...//

Phil: I think you should be able to choose if you want to do Key Skills... is just that sometimes we have nothing to do....

Stuart: It's important for the employers to know that you got the Key Skills but also the work in the workshop is more important... because if you can't do the work in the workshop then you can't do this course if you know what I mean...

David: Just the same thing... only if you really need them... I got all my qualifications so I shouldn't have to do them...

Luke: I think Key Skills is a good idea, because if you didn't get any GCSE's in school you didn't do the job you want... you got second chance to do your Key Skills cos' probably... they probably see Key Skills as English GCSE if you haven't got that then or whatever GCSE you haven't got because you've done a test in Key Skills and stuff like that...

William: They are pointless cos' we've done all this in school like...in the GCSE's... like Maths and stuff... and we've got to do it all over again... (Q. 6a).

[inaud talks]

The same question was asked to the Motor Vehicle students thus;

Marc: yes so you know numbers and something like that...

Craig: I think you should be able to choose if you want to do Key Skills... is just that sometimes we have nothing to do....

Josh: //It's rubbish//

John: I don't think you should be made to do it but I suppose if you can get the grades then... it's a help I think...

Michael: //They are pointless cos' we've done all this in school like...in the GCSE's... like Maths and stuff... and we've got to do it all over again....//

Damian: I don't feel I need to do them if you don't want to do them... they are not helping me to do my job better anyway...

Chris: It think they are pointless because you have to sit here with nowt else to do... cos' I've got my Level 1 already so I don't need to do it until next year... so it's a bit pointless...

Carl: //I think we should have a choice whether you wanna take them or not... I mean the whole thing....// (Q. 6a).

Initially, following a realist stance in my analysis, I cannot accept participants' quotes at face value. This however, was a starting point to my analysis for I needed to look underneath the words to the discourses and ideologies upon which some comments are based. Following the above discourse, for instance, I can affirm that office type work is not for either group, which is a commonsensical, cultural capital, take on the mental-manual divide.

The data, furthermore, suggests that students saw Key Skills as 'boring and pointless', 'a waste of time' and 'a lot of extra work'. So far, students do not see the relevance of doing Key Skills within their own core subject. Instead, the students want to concentrate on their vocational course and particularly on carrying out practical tasks and learning in the college workshop. It would appear that Key Skills, and the extra workload placed on vocational courses, is a concern to Key Skills students and, from my own experience, vocational staff also. Students consider that they have not been given the opportunity to make an informed choice as to whether they want to do Key Skills or not, seeing Key Skills as a return yet again to the same system they experienced for the past five years during senior school.

At the same time, it is clear that no amount of training will result in jobs if there is not sufficient attention paid to job creation. An important point highlighted by Keep (2003) is that the major factor affecting job opportunities are capital

investment and that no amount of skills training can improve that aspect. He (Keep, 2003) also suggests that employers do not know what skills they want or what Key Skills are and even if students have such skills employers are not under any obligation to employ them.

3.13 Ethics of social research

Throughout the research process I took into consideration ethical issues of my research. The main points I have paid due attention to were:

1. Inviting people to be involved
2. Anonymity being guaranteed
3. Students having the right to withdraw at any time
4. Students accepting that their words would be tape recorded
5. Keep the data in a safe place and in a manner that doesn't allow it to be personalised.

Ethical issues are defined as:

‘A matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in pursuit of truth. While truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature’(Cavan, 1977:810).

Closely related to the issue of participants' privacy (Elliot, 1991:75) is that the researcher should negotiate the understanding of, and the interpretation of data in order to assure the anonymity and confidentiality. People have the right to

control information relating to them; therefore they must give their permission for particular uses of that information. Thus, Lincoln & Denzin (2003) argue that:

‘When participants do not ‘own’ the data they have furnished about themselves, they have been robbed of some essential element of dignity, in addition to having been abandoned in harm’s way. If they are accorded the dignity of ownership, they have the right to shape that information’ use and to assist in formulating the purposes to which they will lend their names and information’ (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003:233).

During research encounters, such as the focus groups and personal interviews, it was important to verbally inform and explain to all students the nature and purpose of the research and why it was being carried out. A verbal explanation was given by me alone so that no feeling of pressure was felt by the participants. Students were informed and reassured that they could withdraw at any time during the investigation. It is also important to inform all those involved in the focus groups and personal interviews that the results of the research would be made available to them.

The name of the College of Further Education, the name of the town and students’ names have been changed and/or omitted in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore, names or any other information will not be passed on to other participants in the inquiry. Results of the research will be published in such a way as to ensure the anonymity of the participants. During this investigation, I constantly strived to ensure that the participants’ confidence and self-esteem was never threatened or compromised, taking into

consideration all ethical implications and psychological consequences for the participants of the research project. Researchers must weigh the importance and contribution of their research against the chances and scale of any harm that is likely to be caused (to the people involved, to others, or to future access) and against any violation of privacy involved (Beynon, 1985). The investigation is also concerned with reliability and validity in order to be able to establish its value and usefulness in determining any significance that can be drawn from the results. Reliability is the 'consistency to obtain the same results again'(Oppenheim, 1992:144). Whilst validity tells us whether the question really measures what it is supposed to measure, Sapsford & Evans (1984) suggest that 'validity assesses the soundness of a logical argument' and that reliability relates to the people involved in research as well as to the instruments which they might utilise; noting that:

'Reliability is the consistency of the results obtained when using a measure in research. It is a word used of measuring instruments, including the human observer ..., and refers to the basic scientific requirement that it should be possible for another worker to duplicate one's results or produce comparable evidence, at least in principle' (Sapsford & Evans, 1984:259).

The best approach thus is a research approach known as triangulation.

Triangulation involves:

'Cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible' (OU, 1988:54).

Triangulation is not a method of research, but a method for collaborating the reliability of the data, for:

‘Triangulation between methods employs two or more approaches to a single problem... triangulation between methods compares (at least) two research solutions to a single problem in an effort to validate the outcomes of one approach in terms of the outcomes of another’ (McFee, 1992:215).

Triangulation helps in examining the consistency of the data and interpretations of research results and to verify the consistency of agreement among data, research methods, interpretations and conclusions. Triangulation may also enhance credibility, for ‘the important feature of triangulation is not the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each’ (Fielding & Fielding, 1986:31).

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the research procedures adopted in the research. The next chapter consequently will present the findings, critically evaluating the data of students’ responses of the focus groups and personal interviews drawing interconnected set of discourses in their responses.

Chapter Four: Findings and Data analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analyses of the two focus groups and personal interviews with six students at the end of their first year of study of their vocational course. This chapter also describes the participants taking part in this investigation.

The focus group questions used in the focus groups and the personal interviews attempted to establish the main aim of this study, highlighting the importance of the origin of the student's individual orientation to learning and the extent to which students are willing to assume their role in the learning process. Further aims of this study were, a) what were/are the biographical experiences most influential in assisting the students' to develop their current expressed work and life perspectives; and, b) the students' understanding of Key Skills in Further Education in relation to seeking and obtaining work

In order to carry out the study, I chose the Engineering Vocational Programme area from amongst a wide range of vocational courses of study as that has the highest number of enrolments at the college. Additionally a) engineering and technology dominates jobs in Southlakes Town and other towns in close proximity, b) the college, shipbuilding and manufacturing industry are seen to be working close together; c) local shipbuilding and manufacturing companies are responsible for most of the work based learners in town and in the outskirts

up to a 20 mile radius and, d) because of my personal experience in teaching Key Skills for the last ten years to such courses.

4.2 Group analysis

My qualitative analysis is based on a refined and rigorous narrative of a particular event and is contextualised in a situation that ensures maximum objectivity in the capture of reality; enabling an analysis that leads to obtaining valid knowledge (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Coffey et al., notes that ‘dramatic reconstructions of social reality can help to promote contested and multiple versions of reality while presenting them in a readable (and perhaps watchable) format’ (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996:127). Throughout the focus groups and personal interviews, students were encouraged to present their version of reality by talking about life experiences within the educational context. Subsequently, in analysing their utterances, and in the light of my wider reading as my understanding about the nature of reality, and variations in perceptions of that reality, I developed an account of the students that I believe is correct, and defensible.

4.3 The students

It was theorized in Chapter 2 that different perspectives upon prior family culture and traditions, education, work, job prospects, future education, vocational education, and Key Skills within the vocational education would be exhibited/expressed by the two focus groups and six personal interviews; based

upon their distinctive combinations of educational, social class and gender discourses.

The two groups chosen within the chosen engineering department were 1) Motor Vehicle; and 2) an Engineering Apprenticeship course. I chose these two contrasting groups since one group, the Apprentices, as they had jobs, seemed to be more secure about their vocational future. The other group - the Motor Vehicle students – was merely hoping for a vocational future. The majority of the students live in Southlakes Town, the rest in nearby towns and villages.

The students were all boys between 17 and 18 years of age and, initially based upon impressionistic evidence, predominantly from a working class background. Comparatively, the Motor Vehicle students are low achievers, with few qualifications and serious deficiencies in Literacy and Numeracy. These students work towards Level 2 N.V.Q (National Vocational Qualification) in Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Key Skills Level 2. The Apprentices cohort have achieved the qualifications required (minimum of five G.C.S.E. passes) to enter into vocational areas in Engineering at Level 2. An apprenticeship provides them with the opportunity to continue their studies and earn money as soon as they start the course. Students who enrol on an apprenticeship course are usually employed for 35 hours per week and train both in the workplace (Northern Engineering Company) and at Southlakes College. These students work towards a National Vocational Qualification

(NVQ) Level 3, Key Skills Level 3 and technical certificate. The apprentices group in this study tends to be associated with the high technology or manufacturing industries and Motor Vehicle group who are hoping to find work with a local car garage.

4.3.1 The students' voice: conscious of their own consciousness

A number of students are conscious of their own role in the learning process which is essential for meaningful learning (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Entwistle, 1989; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Shuell, 1990). The Motor Vehicle students are aware that they did not achieve high GCSE qualifications in senior school and were conscious of not being able to apply for an apprenticeship course with the major engineering companies in the area. College based motor Vehicle courses offer students an opportunity whereby at the end of the two year course they might be able to gain a manual paid job in the car industry. Consequently, it is argued that 'it is not surprising (that) attitudes and orientation towards education will differ'(Connolly & Healy, 2004:30). Connolly and Healy go on to say that 'such position should not be read in any way as 'blaming the victim', nor is it meant to imply that all middle-class and working-class boys adopt the same respective form of class habitus' (p.30).

The following short transcript shows an example of students' verbal interaction which can be seen as an indication of their lack of reflection and a failure to acknowledge and reconcile conflict between dialectically opposed modes of

adaptation to the world. Some of the motor vehicle students in the focus group have not acknowledged or are unconscious of their role as participants in the learning process. It is noted during the (pilot) focus groups what Fairclough (2003: 169) refers to a 'modality' meaning the way in which the interviewee words his questions for instance, the motor vehicle students response to the question: What was secondary school like for you? Is:

Daniel //you can't mess around that much//

Keiran //it is easier to do the work
because you are not under so much pressure//

Mattie: and we are doing motor vehicle and not geography or summat
ha, ha, ha, (M.V. Q1).

(laughs: 3 seconds)

Mattie: Why do you want to read a map? Where are you going to
get lost in the Alps if you don't go there (1)

Steven: //why do we need to do English?//

Mark: //yeah why do we want to do
English when we can speak English? That's good i'n't// (M.V. Q1).

Rather than answering the question, 'what was secondary school like for you?' some students reply by countering the question with a different question; e.g. 'Why do we need English?' When students reply in this way, it may imply that they are avoiding giving the first response because they either do not know the answer or because they do not want to appear ignorant in front of the group. In that way they do not feel the fear of being responsible for any incorrect answer. Many of the car mechanic students as opposed to the apprentices did not achieve well in senior school as far as qualifications were concerned; so they

appeared to consider this as failure on their part, and did not want other members of the group to know.

For the car mechanics as well as the apprentices, not doing the same as other members of the group is perceived as being different, and being different is not 'cool' for the 'lads', whereas other students assumed publicly that they did not like school, prefaced with the mental process clause of 'I don't know'. Consequently, there seems to be a problem eliciting the truth and perhaps the students are giving excuses in their answers which may, or may not be the truth as the motor vehicle students comment on the same Question 5;

Will: it is not the right environment for me like...

Daniel: //and I didn't do any
English or maths//

Kristian //it was boring like English//

Daniel //I got kicked out of English, I went
home//

Mattie // I went to
my bird's house (.) me//

Daniel //I just went home (1) teachers shouted at you// (M.V.
Q5).

They seem to be making a factual statement or what Fairclough (2003: 175) calls a 'realist' statement and 'an assertion'. The student seems to want to articulate about his experiences in school but makes a contradictive ending to his answer when Mattie says:

Mattie: I didn't do any work for not having much knowledge (2) that's what it was ha, ha (2) I didn't like it, ha, too much to learn.

When he refers to 'too much to learn' he refers to being unable or unwilling to cope with the school demands. In this particular case, it appears the student did not receive the appropriate learning support needed in school for him to be able to cope with school work.

One apprentice mentions 'too much education', suggesting that he was fully aware that being an accountant would involve studying more, putting more effort into his work and spending more time in formal education:

I am in the Shipyard because it gives me money quick but I wanted to be an accountant but it means too much education (Key Skills session, apprentice student, January, 29th 2009).

Although the apprentices may well opt to do the same sort of job all their lives, they actually have some sort of notion of career change and are already thinking about doing other jobs. As a result, the attitude of the apprentices towards school and qualifications would be different to that of the Motor technicians.

4.3.2 Marc and William: the biography of a motor vehicle student and an apprentice in engineering and their different orientations to learning

In order to locate the position of language discourse and social structure I will attempt to briefly describe the social and educational background of two students chosen at random from the focus groups.

The two students are Marc and William. Marc was 16 years old when he enrolled in September 2008 at Southlakes College to commence a course in

Motor Vehicle Level 2. Marc lives in one of the socially and economically deprived postcode areas in Southlakes Town. His parents divorced when he was 11 years old and since then Marc has lived with his father although he sees his mum once or twice a week. Marc's father works as a welder in 'the yard' (Northern Engineering Company). Marc's mother works full time as a cleaner in one of the local manufacturing companies.

Marc did not enjoy going to school. He also mentioned that he disliked his teachers, although Marc is conscious that he could have done better in school. He feels that most teachers 'gave up' on him because he 'did not understand' the content of most of the subjects, nor had the desire to do the academic work. There were several occasions when he would absent himself from school and remain at home. Clearly, Marc lacked motivation and academic orientation during his secondary experiences in education. However, this does not mean that Marc is not aware of the academic benefits of further and higher education; simply that he has other values (including dispositions to learning) that he places at a more important level which directly affect the way he responds to education and training i.e. meeting his friends in town, socialising and drinking, listening to music or playing on computers. In constructing his reality, Marc draws upon past experience including cultural contexts, self-perception and future expectations. This individual construction of reality (Bhaskar, 1978, 1989; Budd & Douglas, 1996; Derrida, 1976; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Entwistle, 1989; Fairclough, 2003a; Foucault, 1980; Frohmann, 1992;

Hargreaves & Goodson, 2003; Jameson, 1991; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Ricour, 1984) dictates the students' personal agenda for learning.

Marc wanted to enrol onto a Bricklaying Course but by the time he applied, all the available places were filled by other students. So, the college suggested that he apply for a Motor Vehicle Vocational Course instead. For Marc, this was a huge disappointment and a barrier to learning. Six months into his Motor Vehicle course Marc still feels that he would rather be on the Bricklaying Course. Marc has very little support from his parents, as he comments:

‘My mum and dad don’t tell me what to do. They don’t really mind what course I do either’.

I cannot deduce from this type of response whether Marc’s parents have or have not been directly influential in his educational career, but I suggest that the parents are unaware of the part that they could or should have played in shaping and supporting Marc’s future. Marc also mentioned that he did very little work in school and that he ‘always got away with it just by being quiet and sitting at the back of the classroom’. During a Key Skills lesson at the college, Marc was asked to complete an assignment related to the Motor Vehicle Course. With an air of disbelief he commented:

‘A what? An assignment? I haven’t done one in my whole life’!.

Marc is vocationally rather than academically orientated with an emphasis on practical rather than theory work. Marc perceives the course as doing something useful in the short term; however, his motivation and enthusiasm for

participating in the learning process is diminished by the fact that the Motor Vehicle Course was a second choice of career development. Marc's present orientation towards learning is likely to affect the way he interprets the theory and the practical work and he may find it difficult to make sense of what is required in relation to his own needs of self improvement with a consistent view of work and education.

William is also 16 years old. In September 2008 applied for an apprenticeship in the local Northern Engineering Company for which he was accepted. He attends theory and practical lessons at the college. William was accepted by the shipbuilding company because he achieved 6 GCSE, A to C passes which include English, Mathematics, Science, I.C.T., Geography and History. William attended a private school in Southlakes Town and lives in one of the middle class upwards postcodes in the area. William's father also works at Northern Engineering Company. When his father was William's age he too started as an apprentice and moved onto a managerial job after ten years. He has achieved a first degree in Engineering and an MA in science. William's father has now been a manager for twenty-five years. William's mum has no formal qualifications and looks after elderly people in their own homes as a night carer. Northern Engineering Company also employed William's grandparents. William had the opportunity to find a place in Northern Engineering Company for two reasons, firstly because of his GCSE's passes and the second because:

'My dad helped me to get in 'the yard' and I am in the same area as him'.

Parents and grandparents as present or former employees of Northern Engineering Company will often influence their children or grandchildren to follow in their footsteps and start an apprenticeship with the Company in order to gain a 'secured future' as they call it, or to at least 'learn a trade'.

'My dad told me that by starting an apprenticeship course with Northern Engineering Company then at least I can come out with a trade if I don't like it'.

William then went on to say;

'At least I am earning some money now. I can study a university course in Engineering and ask Northern Engineering Company to pay for it. Then once I get my trade and my degree I might find a job somewhere else as I will always have a trade to fall back to...my dad told me...'

William's account may categorise him as having an academic orientation and he seemed to be interested in enhancing his skills and improving his qualifications which he understands are going to be helpful to him in finding work opportunities in the labour market either in Northern Engineering Company or elsewhere. Unlike Marc, William has made a conscious decision for the near future by showing a particular learning orientation - to become an electrician - whilst keeping an open mind about pursuing other options such as a university degree and a change of employment if the opportunity presents itself. In addition, William spoke about his personal, sporting and educational achievements, which suggests that he has understood and accepted his role as a learner, with a consequent strong desire to succeed. Unlike Marc, he enjoyed going to school and worked well during lessons. Although he may have had a strong parental influence in deciding his future career, William is aware that his

future prospects are dependent on his own efforts to further his education by studying a degree at university in order to find other work. A brief analysis of Marc and William's responses show how perception of self and being conscious of one's own consciousness of learning contribute to students' own motivation to learning. For both students there is a relationship between their own orientations to learning and the extent to which Marc and William are willing to engage with the learning process allowing them to develop a personal understanding of the learning experience.

4.4 Focus groups, personal interviews and sets of discourses

From the focus group data, and my related reading, I established a number of repeating ideas that subsequently were grouped together to form themes. My analysis suggests that the two groups of students drew upon four interconnected sets of discourses (sets of cohering models and perspectives relating to, and arising out of personal and interpersonal/group experiences, expressed in and through language, and which affect their actions within their society, in their responses in the focus groups and personal interviews). These sets of discourses are:

4.4.1 Class and family allegiances

4.4.2 Masculinity

4.4.3 Attitudes about their local town

4.4.4 Attitude towards Key Skills

The above set of discourses will be considered in turn.

4.4.1 Social Class and family allegiances

The first discourse is a class based one, articulated through family and family allegiances, but also in relation to the preferred types of jobs (for the motor vehicle, manual jobs as against ones that involve what they defined as mental work, particularly the mental work associated with middle class occupations such as engineering and management). Parental support in students' education plays an important part in this investigation and also because it relates closely with the current political and social contexts explained in Chapter 2.

The working class parents of the apprentices may well support the educational system as a reflection of their own educational and work experiences, as many of the parents and grandparents started an apprenticeship as soon as they completed senior school at the age of 16. This analysis might be usefully enhanced by two points. Firstly, such is the power of education that, asked in the abstract, almost no one would say that education is a bad thing, a point about dominant value systems made by Parkin (1973). It might be that the expansion of Higher Education (HE) in the 1980s and 1990s might now mean that HE has itself become more acceptable as part of the broad social consensus about the value of education. Secondly, however, when asked about levels or types of education, the concrete realities of a class position and/or situation come into play – so a family cultural outlook might suggest that it is not just education that is desirable in the abstract, but a particular concrete, overt level or type of education, such as a vocational education. Based at least partly on their own experiences, these parents and grandparents, who themselves are and were qualified tradesmen, believe that an apprenticeship

will secure a paid job for life and consequently they try to encourage their children to follow in their footsteps even before the completion of senior school. As Phil, - an apprentice - expressed:

Phil: I think my mum and dad had a bit of an effect there because also they wanted me to do something I want to do which is what I am doing now which you know makes me want to do it even more... And just... to please my mum and stuff cos' I want to do it as well (2) and my teachers at old school also wanted me to do it... (A. Q.4).

Children grow up in an environment where strong parental influence acts as a catalyst in their mental preparation for possible future employment when they leave school and may develop students' attitudes towards education and work. Senior family members are role models and it is their previous family experience of education and work that makes the parents and grandparents the role models that they are, and is the influence that is brought to bear on children as they are growing up. Children from a young age identify with the parents as role models for themselves, and are essentially what begins to mentally prepare them for a career after secondary education as two of the apprentices, Gary and Luke articulate:

Gary: Other than myself ... like a few members of my family actually did engineering as well like my uncle ... a few of my cousins... so that's why I wanted to do it...

Luke: For me...my parents I think... and teachers at school (A. Q.4).

This relationship between parent and child, particularly in a working class family, living in a working class area, often results in the child (as a young adult) emulating the parent with regard to academic and work aspirations. The child of a manual worker would often seem to be guided towards manual work

as a means of achieving an early income which (amongst other things) would enable them to contribute to the household bills, whereas the child of skilled parents are more likely to be encouraged to embark on an apprenticeship, with the children of middle class-mental engineering and management families following a similar pattern.

The lack of parental guidance and support for motor vehicle students became clearer when asked the question, “Who had the most effect upon the decision to enrol onto a Motor Vehicle course besides yourself?” John, Damian and Craig answered:

John: Just meself like...

Damian: //Just meself//

Craig: It was just my choice just myself again
(M.V. Q.3).

If the concept of career is considered as a social construction, then one of the ways in which young adults form this concept is through social relationships. Teachers and career advisors in senior schools guide students on possible career paths as Marc and Josh express themselves:

Marc: Teachers at my school like (.) they recommended me to get here...

Josh: My careers adviser at school and that's it (.) no one else told me what to do really (M.V. Q.3).

Parents' influence on career development stems from the continuous process of relationship with their children (Young *et al.*, 1997). Analyzing career-related conversations between adolescents and their parents, Young *et al.*, found ‘a

reconstruction of the relationship between the parent and the adolescent through some aspect of career exploration' (Young *et al.*, 1997:76). Young *et al.*, also demonstrate "how relationships and family functioning are embedded in career conversations and how the construction of career occurs in families" (Young *et al.*, 1997:84).

An example of a case study that relates closely to my investigation in relation to parental involvement was that of Crozier & Reay (2005) who have researched and examined the processes of how family and education are closely related with each other. They (Crozier & Reay, 2005) have highlighted children's perspectives concerning school and their family participation in their learning process and also clear distinctions amongst students' social and cultural backgrounds (Connolly & Healy, 2004) as to how students make their minds up when they choose a vocational course.

Research by Connolly & Healy (2004) also found that most of the working class women who had negative experiences of education said that they did not have any sense of expertise and felt helpless in relation to academic work. By contrast, middle class women were more likely to relate to positive educational experiences with consequent parental interest in the schooling of their own children. Mothers who had very little or non-existent support from their partners found it even more difficult to find the time to help with the progress of their children. Middle class parents who were spending more money in private tuition and 'after school' activities than working class mothers could

earn, also have more positive educational experiences and they seem more confident in their ability to translate this or pass it onto their own children (Crozier & Reay, 2005). In addition, middle class parents were able to articulate and discuss issues more with the teachers and were able to express their point of view in relation to educational issues than working class parents. They also found in the study that middle class mothers were more assertive and that working class mothers often displayed high levels of uncontrolled anxiety which escalated into anger.

As noted in Chapter 3, family, friends and peer group expectations may affect students' own mental image of themselves. Students from a lower to middle class family and/or social background may place greater aspirations on themselves, and expect to achieve a technician grade in the motor vehicle trade or as an apprentice, besides the formal qualifications that they would need in that capacity. However, we cannot assume this in all cases; neither can we reject such aspects as social capital which can affect directly occupational chances (Bourdieu 1986; Adler and Kwon 2001; Gibson et al., 2004:21; Stanton-Salazar 2004). Another example of case study research in relation to class and gender is that of Willis (Willis, 1977) who investigated how education was about 'learning to labour', and a key factor in why working class lads get working class jobs. Willis studied 12 working class boys known as 'the lads' in a secondary school creating a school subculture where these lads rejected the senior school system, gaining acceptance and self esteem through their particular behaviour. This type of behaviour was also related to family

background and their social class for school and college systems prepare them for work under capitalism. Moreover, teachers' objectives, educational expectations and the way they are trying to educate students for further education or employment tend to differ from the students' own perspectives, as students often belong to different social classes, which may even 'reinforce the stratified consciousness on which the fragmentation of subordinate economic classes is based' (Bowles & Gintis, 1976: 129).

The results of the effects on students' attitudes and work aspirations resulting from family commitment as distinct from the environment and situation of their home town cannot be viewed in isolation since they are, to an extent, complementary and both join in shaping the students' attitudes to the world of work and how they perceive themselves in that world.

4.4.2 Masculinity

The second significant discourse affecting the students is their understanding and working out of masculinities in terms of types and levels of jobs. Motor vehicle students are preparing themselves for a manual job and working with their hands, whereas the apprentices are also working with their hands but also they are preparing themselves for technician type roles, and in a sense their attitude towards qualifications would be different (Weis, 1988) as three motor vehicle students, Carl, Craig and Michael articulate:

Carl: Gaining qualifications...it's helpful

Craig:
to get a better job....

I come for the certificate...

Michael: //Education and how to do stuff...// (M.V. Q.5).

Some students have established that they want to prepare themselves for future employment and who wish to continue with the course in order to keep their job prospects open, to form well in their jobs and become equipped to continue with their personal development by acquiring flexible skills. As John, one of the motor vehicle students, explains:

John: Eh...like (2) do me years.... ehm... me years as a car mechanic... and the whole thing... then hopefully I will pass then I get a job.... then if I'm sacked then I may fall back on that... another job... (M.V. Q.6).

Previous knowledge and interest in a particular subject affected their learning strategy. Some of the motor mechanic students have had work experiences in local garages in Southlakes Town; however, they are aware of the need to further their education in order to find employment. As three motor vehicle students articulate:

Josh: I would rather come to college like (.) learn what I need to learn (2) and then find a job... I think...//

Damian: I couldn't learn how to be a car mechanic (.) if I don. come to College....

Chris: //And learning all the bits and bobs about the job that I'm going to need//. (M.V. Q.6).

The apprentices and the motor vehicle students, however, agreed that they would benefit from getting more qualifications in terms of Level 2 capacities i.e. Key Skills in Numeracy, Literacy and ICT but also to push the general level of qualifications to Level 3, 4 and 5. As David and Phil, two engineering apprentice students articulate:

David: Gaining all your qualifications all Key Skills and skills you are going to need in the future like

Phil: //Getting my NVQ Level 2 (laughs) obviously... but...ehm...also gaining friends hopefully learning different things// (A. Q.6).

Luke, Oliver and Stuart - apprentices' students - recognise that gaining the knowledge in practical skills and qualifications are important in order to find employment. Such approach to education would help to focus students and to keep them on task. As they articulate:

Luke: I'm gaining more knowledge in engineering, and how to do stuff...and life skills...

Oliver: //You are gaining life skills that you are gonna to take in every day life... in the future as well as taking your NVQ 2 to the next level...//

Stuart: Well, it's like getting new friends new people and all your qualifications and your qualifications you are going to need to get a job and stuff like that (A. Q.6).

Students' perceptions of school and education, self-esteem, past experiences, previous knowledge, and motivation will have an effect on students' approach to learning. As Gary, Euan and William - three apprentices - illustrate:

Gary: //Life skills, that's basically why we are here like setting us off, gaining confidence and what our job is... everything//

Euan: //Learning how to do my job and getting everyday life skills//

William: //Education, you are learning all the time when you are in the workshop and stuff like that... you are getting better at it so you would be better when you are going into a job if you know what I mean...// (A. Q6).

Although the apprentices may well opt to do the same sort of job all their lives, they have some sort of notion of career change and may already be thinking about doing other jobs; as four apprentices students illustrate:

Phil: Well if I have to I will do more qualifications... yeah...
[inaud talks]

Gary: //Ehm... yes (2)I
could see myself going to university to study engineering on a further
level//

Euan: //yeah... yeah... if need more qualifications to do a job, yes I
would do more qualifications...//

Luke: //yeah... well if I have to yeah.. yeah...// (A. Q.7a).

Some students who did well at school, such as the apprentices, are capable of mentally adapting to the college curriculum and accept that academic work is an essential part of their vocation training. As their views about education are:

William: //erh... yes I would like to go to university and do more in
engineering//

Oliver: //Yes I can see myself doing more... the more you do the
better.... I can see myself going to university.//

Stuart: In the future if you need to
boost them up... I mean... to get a better job... yeah I would do more
because you are more likely to get more jobs...

David: //Yes... I would do more if need
it to... I think... I would like to do my electrical degree (2) but all
depends if a get enough grades to go into university...// (A. Q.7a).

Whilst most Motor Vehicle students suggested in the abstract that they would not be particularly keen on continuing in education beyond achieving the minimum qualifications in order to find employment, some of them indicated, albeit half-heartedly, that they would be willing to make the effort in progressing through college with the aim of finding work. As they explain:

Josh: //Yeah (.) because you don't want to go on the dole, do you... you want to get a job...//

John: //Yeah I would if I could//

Marc: Possible yeah...

Carl: //I would carry on until I am fully qualified and then call it a day...//

Craig: //Yeah maybe...// (M.V. Q.7a).

Motor vehicle students like working in garages because there is a different problem every time a car comes in for repairs. No two jobs per se are exactly the same. In the motor industry, there is a lot more job variation and for the 'lads', getting their hands dirty may also mean 'a masculine job' that allows them to perform problem solving in the workplace. As expressed by motor vehicle students:

Chris: I want to be a grease monkey...

Craig: What is a grease monkey?

Chris: //A motor mechanic that is... but a greasy one...// (M.V. Q.7a).

The motor vehicle students, however, without any qualifications or work experience have to rely on college training to prepare them to a level where they can seek work placements outside the college. Since employers ask the college for recommendations in relation to students' work placements such placements are dependent on students reaching the minimum Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy. As placements are limited, students may need to find their own work placements after college training especially if they want work into a

specific area such as Carl who wishes to become a sport mechanic as he comments:

Carl: Me (.) I wanna be a motor sport mechanic... (M.V. Q.7a).

Carl, however, does not realise that in order to acquire the qualification to enable him to become a motor sport mechanic, he needs to study to a higher level than the college can currently offer him.

When motor vehicle students think about themselves there is a clear bifurcation as they tend to glamorise certain aspects of the motor vehicle, such as sets of wheels, speed, attention from girls, bravado as well as being anti-women's work, and assembly lines that reduce personal space and possibilities, and so in a sense they are preparing themselves for a role of low level work in the car industry instead of being fully equipped apprentices in motor vehicle engineering.

Apprenticeship students fare somewhat better in that their parents are more likely to offer support during their primary and secondary education, with further encouragement for them to apply for an apprenticeship shortly prior to leaving school. Students, in addition, have parents or other relatives who could help them to find an apprenticeship scheme in the shipyard and successful school leavers will then have the benefit of a paid job whilst attending college.

As Gary, Luke and Phil illustrate:

Phil: I would like to be a successful engineer you know... and earn good money... which I don't think is a bad ambition.

Gary: Well I want to earn good money obviously but more than that I want a job for life in the yard... (2) and then do it for the next forty years maybe because it's what I enjoy Do motor vehicle and do something with sports like... something like that... I think.

Luke: I just want to be a successful engineer in industry and work in the yard (A. Q.5a).

The students' transcripts in relation to future ambitions and type of jobs relate to standardisation and production processes; and it is partly about the technologies, social relationships in the workplace, but mainly that this sort of discourse interrelates with class, masculinity and their attitudes about their local town.

4.4.3 Attitudes about their local town 'Southlakes Town'

The third set of discourses relates to the isolation of the town, and involves attitudes about place and space, being either cosmopolitan (outward regional and nationally/internationally focused) or localised (Connolly & Healy, 2004). When the students think and talk in the abstract about moving away from the town, they will tend to link into, and articulate, aspects of the dominant ideological discourses, including the economic need for qualifications and geographical mobility. When discourses relate to them personally, however, their local family, neighbourhood, school and work experiences are used as the basis for their responses. These young adults live in a small-sized and isolated town, which means that 'the lads' develop a strong social network of friends where seeing each other often is common practise. In effect, many of them have not travelled yet to nearby surrounding areas. Although they seem to be fully

aware of finding employment in other areas, they would rather stay in the town with their families and friends. As noted by Connolly & Healy:

‘The different perceptions of locality found between the working-class and middle class boys, as outlined above, provides the context within which the boys’ differing attitudes toward education and future careers can be understood’ (Connolly & Healy, 2004).

While students may consider working in a different locality, in reality many would prefer to stay in the town as they see no relation between their local experiences, their own characteristics and the prospect of job opportunities in other areas. As both groups - motor vehicle and apprenticeship students – articulate:

Chris: No, I don’t want to move out of Southlakes... I’m going to stay in Southlakes, but if there is nothing here for me...then... (.) I would have to find a job somewhere else... out of the town... but it’s a lot quieter in here....

Michael: //No, I want to stay in Southlakes I think...//

Craig: I would be prepared to move out of town at the moment... for more money like (.) I would...

Carl: //I would like to go round the world like... (Laughs) yeah... working I think....// (M.V. Q.5b).

Four of the apprentices’ students reflect on whether they would like to move away from Southlakes Town:

Euan: When I get to year 4 I want to move to Lancaster and after I finish my training perhaps then I would like to travel all over the world.

William: //I’m happy to stay here, but I would consider moving away and working off shore or something like that//

Oliver: I want to stay round where my local ...and my village is... I wouldn’t like to move out of Southlakes

Phil: //No, I just want to be here in this town because I got everything I need.// (A. Q.5b).

It would appear that most students have a strong desire to stay in Southlakes Town where they were born; probably because their parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends live in the same town. The local shipyard, also, places a strong influence in peoples' lives. The reality is, however, that the shipyard is not taking as many candidates as they did twenty or thirty years ago. Despite the much reduced intake at the shipyard, some students feel that employment in the 'yard' is still a possibility should they choose to apply themselves. As the apprentices articulate with some passion their desire to stay in their local town:

Gary: //Yeah... I am the same I wanna stay in Southlakes... I wouldn't like to move anywhere else...//

Stuart: //I really wanna stay in Southlakes Town where my friends are... I don't think I would like to move away from the town//

Luke: I'm happy to stay here... in the local area... (A. Q.5b).

Participants were born in the town area, as were their families and friends for many generations. This may affect participants' attitudes towards their local town and their ultimate decision to remain in their locality. The discourse models can be defined as:

'Connected to prototypical simulations we can run in our heads. Because we humans share ways of looking at things with other member of our various social and cultural groups, we all have the capacity to form 'prototypical simulations'. Prototypical simulations are the sorts of simulations you will run in your head (of things like weddings, parenting, voting and so forth) when you take the situation to be 'typical'.

What is taken as 'typical' differs across different social and cultural groups of people' (Gee, 2005:95-96).

The discourse model of the participants in relation to emigrating outside the town in order to find work is what Gee (2005) calls participants' 'simulation or simulations' of events running in their minds (image) when the participants as a group are able to imagine what it can be like living away from home. Student's imagined futures may be different from the reality they live in now as John and Josh comment:

John: Yes (.) I would live somewhere else as well...

Josh: //I would move out of town... out in the country...// (M.V. Q5b).

They have had their dream, their imagined future for some time but the way to achieve that dream may be blurred or unclear. Students imagined futures might bring about a change in cultural experience, which students might not be prepared to go through, therefore, the option of staying in their local town is very much a possibility, indeed, a probability. The milieu of the local town militates against moving out of the area and during the transition from school to college their attitudes are in a state of flux caused by the uncertainty about what they would find when moving from school to college or college to work. Any ambition about moving away from Southlakes Town is suppressed by the uncertainty of what lies ahead after college.

4.4.4 Attitude towards Key Skills

The fourth in this set of discourses relates students' attitude to Key Skills. An example which relates to this investigation in relation to students' attitudes towards Key Skills is a 2001 research sample of 27 students in Dudley College in West Midlands, of which 17 were female students (Hammond, 2001). The data obtained by questionnaire from this predominantly white female group, whilst not being very representative (since my target group were all males) but useful nonetheless, suggests that students saw Key Skills as 'boring and pointless', 'a waste of time' and 'a lot of extra work'. The students at Dudley College (60% of them) felt that Key Skills did not help them with their programmes of study, but merely created a lot of extra work. Phil and Stuart expressed similar views about their Key Skills experiences at College as motor vehicle students revealed:

Phil: I think you should be able to choose if you want to do Key Skills... is just that sometimes we have nothing to do....

Stuart: It's important for the employers to know that you got the Key Skills but also the work in the workshop is more important... because if you can't do the work in the workshop then you can't do this course if you know what I mean... (M.V. Q.6a).

Various students do demonstrate that they have the skills that they claim to have and if differentiation is correctly applied, these students should be given relevant, interesting and more demanding work to do in order to keep them engaged. In practice, in Southlakes College, this does not happen to a satisfactory degree. The initial computerised diagnostic testing of Numeracy and Literacy which determines the course entry levels is either insufficiently accurate for that purpose or the staff do not pay sufficient attention to the

results. Not surprisingly students are resentful, because having already done Key Skills during senior school they feel they have to do it all over again. As a number of apprentices comment:

Oliver: Well like I said, in Key Skills you are gaining more knowledge so yeah I think it's good... but you shouldn't have to do it if you got the grades already... only if you need to boost your grades up I think... (A. Q.6a).

Euan: Key Skills itself is essential but I would say it's that important... because I did really well in school I didn't need to do any exams... I got my GCSE's C and above... all of them I completed my work quite quickly... unlike other people

David: Just the same thing... only if you really need them... I got all my qualifications so I shouldn't have to do them...

Luke: I think Key Skills is a good idea, because if you didn't get any GCSE's in school you didn't do the job you want you got second chance to do your Key Skills cos' probably... they probably see Key Skills as English GCSE if you haven't got that then or whatever GCSE you haven't got because you've done a test in Key Skills and stuff like that...

William: They are pointless cos' we've done all this in school like...in the GCSE's... like Maths and stuff... and we've got to do it all over again... (A. Q.6a).

There is evidence in this research that students would prefer to learn by 'doing' - practical skills - rather than attending theory lessons such as Key Skills in a classroom. Students mentioned in this investigation that they would rather be in a workshop and learning relevant vocational skills than Key Skills which they claim they either already have, or consider irrelevant. As Gary, a motor vehicle student emphasised in the transcript:

Gary: I'd say you may have to do it but I wouldn't compare it with what you do at the workshop, because the stuff we do in Key Skills is the same as what we did in school... what we learn in here we have already done it... so we already have the experience but what we do in the workshop is different... it's new every day. (M.V. Q.6a).

The motor vehicle students have demonstrated that they share the same feelings as the apprenticeship group in relation to their perceptions about Key Skills.

When motor vehicle students were asked if in their opinion Key Skills was needed as part of their course they replied:

Craig: I think you should be able to choose if you want to do Key Skills... is just that sometimes we have nothing to do....

Marc: Yes (.) so you know numbers and something like that...

John: / /I don't think you should be made to do it but I suppose if you can get the grades then... it's a help I think...//

Josh: //It's rubbish// (M.V. Q.6a).

Students feel that they do not want to attend to Key Skills lessons as they find them boring, with nothing to do and pointless. The difficulty for tutors of Key Skills is how they reconcile the demands of the Key Skills agenda and that of students' needs. The staff, however, need to reconsider the suitability of current teaching and learning strategies, with a view to making changes to practice which may reflect a more student centred approach rather than a teacher led approach. The following responses of the motor vehicle group reflect students' perceptions of Key Skills:

Michael: They are pointless cos' we've done all this in school like...in the GCSE's... like Maths and stuff.

... and we've got to do it all over again...

Damian: I don't feel I need to do them if you don't want to do them... they are not helping me to do my job better anyway...

Chris: It think they are pointless because you have to sit here with nowt else to do... cos' I've got my Level 1 already so I don't need to do it until next year... so it's a bit pointless....

Carl: //I think we should have a choice whether you wanna take them or not... I mean the whole thing...// (M.V. Q.6a).

Various students were of the view, however, that the college was helping them to develop 'life skills' and the skills they are likely to need in the future as the apprentices reflect:

David: Gaining all your qualifications all Key Skills and skills you are going to need in the future like...

Stuart: Well, it's like getting new friends new people and all your qualifications and your qualifications you are going to need to get a job and stuff like that...

Gary: //Life skills, that's basically why we are here like setting us off, gaining confidence and what our job is... everything// (A. Q.6).

There is, however, an awareness of the effect that the degree of social change in recent years has had on family life, brought about by changes in government Policy, the economic situation and career opportunities. This is particularly noticeable amongst engineering companies in the local area where reduction in large orders has led to a corresponding reduction in the workforce. The reduction in the number of the employees at Northern Engineering Company, some of whose apprentices form part of this study group, has led to engineering companies being more selective, not only in the academic ability of potential employees, but also in their social skills such as communication, time-keeping, team work, and organisational skills. Some apprentices' students, however, seem to be a little vague in their answers when they were asked what they were getting out by coming into college as they comment:

Phil: Getting my NVQ Level 2 (laughs) obviously.. but...ehm...also gaining friends hopefully learning different things

Luke: //I'm gaining more knowledge in engineering, and how to do stuff...and life skills...//

Euan: //Learning how to do my job and getting every day life skills//

William: //Education, you are learning all the time when you are in the workshop and stuff like that... you are getting better at it so you would be better when you are going into a job if you know what I mean...// (A. Q.6).

The responses of the Motor Vehicle students were somewhat shorter and less sophisticated than the apprentices. In reality, however, both groups were able to articulate a similar meaning in relation to their perceptions about Key Skills. Everyone would agree that education is a good thing to have for future employment and to be able to function in everyday life. The responses of the motor vehicle students' when they were asked in the focus groups what they were getting out of coming to college were:

Carl: Gaining qualifications...it's helpful

Craig: I come for the certificate... to get a better job....

Marc: //Yes...to get a qualification...//

Michael: //Education and how to do stuff...//.

Damian: I couldn't learn how to be a car mechanic (.) if I don't come to College....

Chris: //And learning all the bits and bobs about the job that I'm going to need. (M.V. Q.6).

John and Josh – motor vehicle students - were able to express their feelings about education in general in a positive manner:

John: Eh...like (2) do me years.... ehm... me years as a car mechanic... and the whole thing... then hopefully I will pass then I get a job.... then if I'm sacked then I may fall back on that... another job...

Josh: //I would rather come to college like (.) learn what I need to learn (2) and then find a job... I think...// (M.V. Q.6).

The focus groups investigation resulted in valuable data which triangulates with published research by Abbott (1997) who concludes that:

‘Students across subject areas at intermediate and advanced levels also expressed their dislike of Key Skills. Many students failed to see the relevance of Key Skills, and they claimed that the time devoted to this area of work could have been better utilised on other activities. It is worth recording that many of the students who expressed a dislike of Key Skills had experienced difficulties in areas such as English and Mathematics during their period of compulsory schooling. There was a feeling amongst many of these students that these areas could be left behind now that they had decided to concentrate on what they considered to be a vocational pathway’ (Abbott, 1997:627).

Students generally tend to dislike Key Skills or fail to see the relevance of them. Students want to concentrate only on the vocational course in which they enrolled and doing practical tasks in the college workshop. Parental influence and support is not present in the case of the Motor Vehicle group and parents are not seen to be steering them in any particular direction. It would appear that Key Skills and the extra workload placed on vocational courses is of concern to Key Skills students and, from my own experience, staff also.

Students do not see the connection between Key Skills sessions and their own vocational engineering subjects because the Key Skills tasks appear not to be relevant, nor are they interesting in terms of their choice of career.

The pilot research study by Abbott (1997) of further education students analyses GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) provision and the reasons for students choosing a particular course and other areas of concern such as Key Skills. Since many students fail to see the relevance of Key Skills they claim that the time devoted to this area of work could have been better utilised on other activities.

Students have experienced difficulties in areas such as English and Mathematics during their period of compulsory schooling and feel that these areas could be left behind now that they have decided to concentrate on what they consider to be a vocational pathway (Abbott, 1997:627) . From the data drawn by Abbott, there appears to be a necessity to review the Key Skills curriculum and the notion of transferable skills in order to overcome the problems faced by developing these skills and the review of the way in which Key Skills is taught and assessed in colleges.

4.5 Conclusion

The aim of this Chapter 4 was to focus on the analysis of the two focus groups these being: 1) Motor Vehicle 2) Apprentices in order to establish repeating ideas that may subsequently be grouped together to form cultural themes and to explore students' social background, perceptions and attitudes towards education. Following the analysis of the interviews twelve months after conducting the Focus Groups I found that there were three interesting aspects in that statements collected during the second year personal interviews had

changed very little from those collected during the Focus Group sessions in the first year and these are:

- 1) Most students were aware, or seemed to be, of the necessity to move out of town of Southlakes which relates to globalization,
- 2) The persistence of their points of view about work, education and Key Skills and,
- 3) Likewise, students' career aspirations had not altered and their ambitions seemed to be much the same as in their first year.

The findings and data analysis in this chapter were presented in the context of the four conceptual frameworks that emerged from the literature review in Chapter 2:

- 1 Class;
- 2 Masculinity;
- 3 Locality;
- 4 Attitude towards Key Skills.

The statements collected during the focus groups and personal interviews suggest that most students were aware of the necessity to achieve good results in order to find employment in the local town. In a relatively small town like Southlakes, however, where there is great competition between school leavers for the relatively few job opportunities, Southlakes College is seen as a stepping-stone to further education and work. Transition, however, between school, college and work is not as smooth as it could be and can prove to be an

uncertain experience for many students, uncertain in that students' past experiences in education do not necessarily link with the aspirations for the future work they are hoping to accomplish. Students at Southlakes College have enrolled onto a vocational course in order to learn and develop their practical skills. Students, then, are disappointed when they realise that Key Skills form part of their own vocational education. This is because they feel that they have done Literacy and Numeracy skills in the past during secondary school and that these skills are an unnecessary addition to their vocational course. This is because the work carried out during Key Skills lessons does not focus on their own vocational area and does not match students' needs. Employers also play a significant part in evaluating young adults' skills which demonstrates how willing these employers are to provide young adults with an attractive career opportunity, thereby having a direct impact on their future aspirations.

With regard to employers' attitudes in recruiting young people and following on from the discourses about family allegiances, social class and masculinities, there seems to be strong evidence that parents' work attitude and social experiences in turn influence the development of their children's attitudes to work and education, where in terms of social stratification has also 'a direct influence in transmitting differences in qualification over the generations' (Mayer & Solga, 2008:56) therefore, early selection of career subjects within the school system is influenced by their social origin and personal aspirations.

5. Chapter Five: Staff interviews: past and present Coordinators of Key Skills

5.1 Introduction

The concern in this chapter is the analysis of the transcripts of three Coordinators of Key Skills (past and present) in order to determine their views and perceptions about Key Skills and various concerns including curriculum issues and provision, staff and students attitudes to Key Skills, female staff teaching male students, the impact of locality and job markets and a planned dominant model of Key Skills rationale. The Coordinators are in a key position in determining staffing and curriculum implementation, being both the leaders of the staff team but also the management representative to staff. The Coordinators of Key Skills interview schedule is in Annex A6. The main focus areas appear in 5.2.

5.2 Coordinators of Key Skills background and qualifications

Carol, one of the three Coordinators, agreed to be interviewed face to face, but not before being previously given some idea of the kind of questions I would want to ask. As a result, many of her answers were in a sense rehearsed although interesting nonetheless. Carol achieved a Cert Ed and an MA in education. Her job title at the time of the interview was Deputy Director of Learner Entitlement/CPD (Continuous Personal/Professional Development). Carol was previously a teacher of languages in a College of Further Education before joining Southlakes College in 2002. She taught Basic Skills and Key Skills before becoming the Coordinator of Key Skills and Basic Skills at the College in 2006 and continued in that post until 2008 when she was asked to

take on the role of encouraging the staff at Southlakes College to embed Literacy and Numeracy skills into all vocational areas. Her revised role also involved the review of the use of diagnostic assessment by members of the vocational areas and staff of Key Skills.

Marion, the second of the Coordinators to be interviewed, was happy to chat face to face without any previous knowledge of the interview questions and was much more open in her responses. I felt that her answers were given thoughtfully and honestly without any need to 'toe the college line'. Marion used to teach English as a foreign language in France and Holland and holds a first degree in English. Marion came to Southlakes College in 2008 to take up the post of Coordinator of Key Skills left vacant by Carol. Soon after her arrival there was a restructuring of staff roles within the Southlakes College and Marion was asked to be involved in the management of the Health and Social Care group with Key Skills leadership being removed from her remit. Marion later became Learner Entitlement Manager, and now teaches adult Literacy and Numeracy but still delivers some Key Skills classes. Marion also considers herself to be a Skills for Life (Key Skills) specialist.

The last staff member from whom I sought an interview was Pat, the current Coordinator of Key Skills at the College since 2009. Pat declined to answer questions face to face but agreed to give me her responses in the form of a written response to my questions. Overall, her responses were both shorter and, in my view, much more guarded than those of the other two Coordinators.

Previous to joining the college she worked for a local IT company as a secretary in the accounts department as well as a dog trainer. She has been employed by Southlakes College since 2001 as a teacher of Key Skills.

The background and qualifications of the three Coordinators merit some comment as it would seem that the college was progressively lowering the academic standards required for the post. On querying this perception with a senior Personnel staff member at Southlakes College, I was assured that, whilst academic qualifications were important, experience and leadership qualities along with the ability to work under pressure were paramount. Marion's transcript appears in Annex A7. I decided to use Marion's transcript because her answers were totally unrehearsed. I also felt that as she was the last to join the staff of the college and as a non-local person, her views were the least likely to be tempered by the culture of the town and the culture of the college.

5.3 Coordinators of Key Skills: Interviews

Interviews were carried out with present and past Coordinators in order to provide data to enable me to triangulate the outcomes. The main sections of the interview schedule were centred on the following foci:

- 1 Coordinators of Key Skills educational background and current post
- 2 Coordinators of Key Skills personal values and beliefs in relation to:
 - a) College management,
 - b) Curriculum issues,

- c) Staff's attitude to Key Skills, and the relationship between Key Skills and Vocational areas
- d) Teaching and learning
- e) Students' attitude to Key Skills
- f) Masculinity issues: staff teaching male students
- g) Key Skills rationale and curriculum model
- h) Locality as a determining factor in influencing students' attitudes to education and work.

(See Annex A6 for Coordinators of Key Skills interview schedule).

From a micro level of analysis, the data findings emerging from the three interviews were grouped into commonalities and differences that arose between the three respondents. Pat was much more reluctant in her responses to the interview schedule than Carol, for instance, who was less forthcoming than Marion, who was the most voluble and also the most reflective of the three respondents. This is partly because of social distance from the Coordinator's post, but also because her current job involves caring more directly about student learning and experiences.

Marion's current role too is inclined to make her aware of the student perspective. This suggests that Marion and Carol have developed higher order analytical skills and demonstrates their capacity to reflect upon Key Skills in their responses to the interview questions.

5.4 College Policy on Key Skills

The College has produced a policy document which prescribes how Government policy on the implementation and delivery of Key Skills should be carried out within the Southlakes College, taking into account local employer concerns and funding agency issues regarding student retention and completion. The policy states very early on that ‘All full time students are entitled to Key Skills and the support in Literacy, Numeracy and Information Communication Technology that this involves. This support aims to raise achievement within each vocational area and so help to improve retention across the college as a whole’ (See Annex A8:1).

Analysis of the document reveals that the College Key Skills policy is conceptualised as employer-led needs. The concept of Key Skills, however, whilst fundamental and essential’, is a residualist concept, in that the student minimum entitlement is in 3 basic skills: Numeracy, Communication and Information Communication Technology. Additional Key Skills are dependent upon employer input and agreed curriculum requirements. Furthermore, rather than enhance the scope of Key Skills to take other employment possibilities into account (e.g. self-employment), students are denied key skill development in areas such as entrepreneurship and market research as well as, for example, basic accounting, bookkeeping and marketing. Although such alternative skills do not figure in the Key Skills policy, they are available as stand-alone courses.

The policy thus is prescriptive and hierarchical, seeing Key Skills as only being relevant at NVQ Levels 1-3 and not above. Given this emphasis upon low level courses having to study Key Skills, the college clearly is utilising a deficiency model of Key Skills. The wording of the policy, however, is to an extent contradictory, with only three core skills being stated as essential. Other self-analytical and interpersonal skills, such as Improving Own Learning & Performance, Problem Solving, and Working with Others are offered to work based students and apprentices when required as part of the course framework.

The use of assertive words such as ‘fundamental and essential’ in the policy too may be a case of trying to convince sceptics such as vocational tutors the value of Key Skills. Many vocational skill tutors see the development of Key Skills as inherent in their work and better cultivated in alternative culturally based approaches to learning such as work-based learning, apprenticeships and the like. The Key Skills document contains, too, a policy of individualised diagnostic testing, though timetabling and ‘batch production’ methods of managing groups of students severely curtails the operation of such diagnostic practices as the assessment and recognition of prior learning.

As a consequence;

1. Key Skills are likely to be delivered via whole class learning environments instead of individualised assessment and learning.
2. Students continue to be timetabled for Key Skills lessons, even where they can prove competence already.
3. Alternative types of evidence are not listed in the Key Skills Policy document, so that the process of assessing and recognising learning is

likely to be an 'exam' type format, a format in which students already fail. This situation is likely to engender further antipathy to Key Skills.

The policy document, with regard to staff, states that "all staff involved directly or indirectly in managing, delivery and supporting Key Skills will be familiar with the aim, objectives and strategy for delivery". Despite such statements, no guidance is given as to how outcome is to be accomplished. Without such statements, and actions to back the statements up, the tendency for non-Key Skills staff to be dismissive and uninvolved is likely to continue. A fundamental flaw in the policy then, is that the College dictates what should be taught, but not how. It is against the background of the aims expressed in this document, and the above reflection of its contents that the Coordinators of Key Skills comments have been analysed.

5.5 Coordinators of Key Skills: Data Analysis

The prevailing mood, attitudes and the length of the answers of the Coordinators were in stark contrast with each other. Marion, in comparison with Pat and Carol, was openly pessimistic when discussing aspects of her work at the college. At times during the interview Marion (immediate past coordinator) became somewhat emotional in her answers.

In the following transcript, Marion openly displays her emotions when she describes the learners who have chosen a vocational course thus:

That's why they have chosen a practical subject and all of a sudden made to go to Key Skills.... well that creates antagonism... and the

vocational tutors don't think anything of it either, so that creates the attitude of the students and you know ... so you've got bad behaviour.... you've got lack of achievement on the Key Skills and on the vocational course, so actually what they are doing is getting them through the vocational course, you know, so everybody is cheating so... because nobody is addressing the needs of the learner... nobody is looking at the learner as a holistic entity that has needs in the vocational area and in the Literacy and Numeracy (Marion, past Coordinator for Key Skills, Q. 4).

Marion is expressing a similar view to that of the other Key Skills Coordinators in that students attend college to learn practical skills specific to their chosen vocation, only to find that Maths and English, which they assumed they had left behind in senior school, are an important part of the course. Marion passionately expresses her concern about students' needs and negative views of other members of the Key Skills staff as she continues:

And all those needs are not being addressed so everybody is cheating... and they are not like me... so passionate about students' needs (Marion, past Coordinator for Key Skills, Q.4).

The above comment by Marion implies that students' needs are not being met at the college. Marion's reference to 'everybody is cheating', for instance, suggests that, in the absence of a properly planned approach to the teaching of Key Skills, students who may be borderline pass/fail candidates at the end of the course are likely to be awarded a 'pass' in order to maintain achievement levels for the college.

Marion's reference in the above transcript to 'they are not like me' indicates that, in her view, senior management and staff focus on student retention and achievement outcomes rather than focusing on the students' real learning needs.

This perspective is sustained by my own experience at the college, for teaching staff feel pressurised by senior college management to achieve high retention and achievement figures. Marion also feels that the current delivery of Key Skills does not facilitate students' learning and generates further confusion as students expressed the question: Why do I have to do Key Skills? Marion feels de-motivated by the lack of support she considers that she experienced from her Line Manager at Southlakes College as she articulates:

I think I am in the wrong place (laughs) I know that... everything stops at my line manager then my line manager and the Deputy Director for 14 to 16 year olds... go off and talk and then they come back and do something else... sometimes they incorporate what I suggested but sometimes....most times they ignore things (Marion, past Coordinator for Key Skills, Q.2).

Marion is clearly disenchanted by the apparent lack of interest shown by her superiors when her suggestions for improving students' active and willing engagement with Key Skills are put forward for their (college management) consideration. Marion suggests that all her efforts and ideas about improving the teaching and learning at college are being blocked by her line manager. Managers sometimes incorporate her ideas but not as often as Marion would like. The two line managers are well established in their positions and may not be prepared to change in the way they operate at the college.

Carol shares Marion's views concerning the attitude of many Key Skills and vocational teaching staff, for she articulates:

I believe that, by and large, our Key Skills teaching staff are committed academics who consider Key Skills as an essential part of lifelong

learning.... as I do... and which is relevant in any field of endeavour. Sadly however, some Vocational tutors seem to feel that.... for the most part.... the average worker will have little need of Key Skills during much of his or her working life. Tutors, who teach Key Skills exclusively, despite their dedication to the teaching of Key Skills, encounter problems not experienced by other tutors to the same degree. I'm referring here to (counts on fingers) student apathy, intransigence, rudeness, bad behavior and even hostility bordering on physical and verbal violence. I think it's fair to say that this has resulted in fairly low morale amongst tutors within the Key Skills department (Carol, past Coordinator for Key Skills).

Carol additionally suggests that tutors of Key Skills frequently encounter bad behaviour by young male adults. Whilst this research does not focus upon the different cultures within the college, there does seem to be different staff cultures between staff of vocational areas and staff of Key Skills. Students appear to show more willingness to attend classes in the workshop rather than in the classroom. The work that students do in the workshop is more vocationally orientated and consequently is seen by them to be more relevant for what they want to do in future. Some vocational tutors consider Key Skills to be a waste of time. Students easily can become aware of such perspectives and subscribe to the views themselves.

5.5.1 College Key Skills Policy issues

Pat, the current coordinator for Key Skills appears to be less critical in her responses with regard to college Policy issues. When she was asked to comment about how staff within the team/across the college feel about the provision of Key Skills and what the management attitude towards Key Skills was, she replied:

Generally the team remains positive and focused however, there is a feeling that we can't make learners work if they do not want to. In those instances staff members are encouraged to develop new and innovative ways of learning for their learners.

Across college there is a better understanding of the work we do as we continue to strive to raise awareness and forge links with vocational areas.

We have a Key Skills Policy that states the entitlement of learners to Key Skills and SMT (Senior Management Team) support this Policy and the work that the department do (Pat, current Coordinator for Key Skills).

In my experience, Pat is correct when she says that tutors cannot make learners work if they do not want to and consequently, of necessity, are encouraged to develop new and innovative ways of learning for the learners as well as class management. Since Pat's responses were written than rather than communicated verbally during interview, the opportunity to ask further questions was not available, and so it is unclear from her comments who does the encouraging and how. One of the objectives contained in the College Key Skills Policy document is 'to ensure clear communication and to define procedures for sharing good practice' and it is probably this to which Pat alludes when she states that 'staff are encouraged to develop new and innovative ways of learning for the learner'. Despite such institutional statements, my own experience is that the development of 'new and innovative ways of learning' has only come about as the result of my own reflective practice rather than any downward pressure or encouragement by senior management.

In relation to the question about how Key Skills staff and other departments across the college feel about the provision of Key Skills, Pat's comments are at variance with the comments made by Carol. Pat suggests that the vocational departments have a good understanding of the work being done in Key Skills. Carol comments, however, that 'vocational tutors seem to feel that for the most part the average worker will have little need of Key Skills during much of his or her working life'. This may reflect the relative distance that Pat now is from the practicalities of teaching Key Skills, but there is some grain of truth in her comments.

Pat comments that, 'there is a Key Skills Policy stating the entitlement of all learners which is supported by the senior management', the implication being that merely stating the Policy is sufficient for its effective implementation. Information, however, on how the Policy should be carried out, is missing, which makes Pat's view somewhat naive.

Apart from the information stated in the Key Skills Policy document, Pat makes very little comment on college management attitude to Key Skills. Pat's silence with regard to college management attitude may also signal a wish "not to rock the boat" with regard to her relationship with senior management. Carol, however, refers to the management attitude as:

You ask about Management attitude....hmmm....I would say it's one of....em... conformity (by college management with regard to government Key Skills Policy). The government has decreed that Key Skills programmes should be implemented across the country and government guidelines dictate how this should be done (Carol, Past Coordinator for Key Skills).

A factor in the creation of such differences might be the personal classes taught by Pat. Pat teaches Level 3 apprentices ten hours a week. Having been in the college for at least two years, and having external employer support, may be a factor in the apprentices demonstrating a strong desire to learn. Pat's views thus appear to be more positive than Marion's and Carol's. Since apprentices are the only students that Pat teaches, she does not have the same exposure to the more difficult type of student behaviour that the other Key Skills tutors experience.

Pat also views her Coordinator's role as 'the provider of information' to Key Skills staff. As she elicits:

We have team sessions of sharing good practice on a weekly/monthly basis and attend North West network meetings twice yearly. This ensures that a coordinated approach to the delivery of Key Skills is evident and all staff are kept up to date with local and national developments (Pat, current Coordinator of Key Skills).

The good practice meetings as described by Pat would be welcome as part of the college Key Skills Policy if consistently carried out. These good practice meetings, however, only occur at the beginning of the academic year rather than on a weekly basis throughout the year as stated by Pat. In my experience, also, meetings are not always attended by those tutors with the most need. The result is a case of 'preaching to the converted' with very little sharing of good practice taking place.

In her answer to the question posed about her views in relation to Key Skills Curriculum, teaching resources and the relationship with other departments, Pat states:

Relationships with other departments continue to grow and develop and we are seeing some very positive things coming out of this. As with everywhere there are departments who are more resistant to this approach but this is largely due to the fact they too are undergoing major change (Pat, current Coordinator of Key Skills).

Although in the above response she expresses positive sentiments towards departmental relationships it also emerges that curriculum issues, teaching and resources have been ignored in her response. As Pat lacked any academic experience and qualifications prior to joining the college staff, her response possibly may suggest a lack of understanding on her part of current curriculum issues and their close relationship with teaching and learning. Additionally, curriculum issues usually are discussed between curriculum managers and college Coordinators with no other staff involved. This situation may explain the infrequency with which such information is being passed on to teaching staff. Pat's position differs from that of Marion who voices her views about curriculum and staff thus:

The problem is that although I taught and managed the Key Skills department for a while, you know, it's not really a taught qualification in a lot of areas. I would think the model has to be personalised learning, individual learning, individual learning plans you know, assessing peoples' needs and assessing them... (Q.8) staff feel insecure in themselves, and they haven't got the wider picture... well... I wonder sometimes when they (College management) talk about the voice of the learner and entitlement but really they are just ticking boxes, you know... and they (College management) don't really believe like I do (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q.2).

Marion seems to be suggesting that Key Skills should not be taught as a separate subject but incorporated into vocational lessons based on the needs of each vocational group, with individualised learning plans being based on an assessment of individual students needs.

Marion, also, suggests that the Key Skills staff and the management should adopt a more personalised learning style during Key Skills lessons in order to match the needs of each individual students and to listen to ‘the voice of the learner’.

5.5.2 Students’ attitudes to Key Skills

In response to the question ‘in your personal experience what are students’ attitudes to Key Skills?’ the Key Skills Coordinators gave the following responses:

In a word – indifferent! Students generally feel that Key Skills are an unnecessary addition to their vocational curriculum activities i.e. work based theory and ‘hands on’ (workshop) activities. A lot of students say that it is like being back at school (Carol, past coordinator for Key Skills).

Generally the attitude to Key Skills is negative; however this is very much dependant on area of vocational study and the work being undertaken in class (Pat, current Coordinator for Key Skills).

Well they refused... because, no, no, because the majority had A to C (pass levels) so they didn’t want to waste their time on improving their Literacy when it wasn’t required for the course (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills).

The above perceptions about students’ attitudes to education indicate that students’ dispositions to learning generally and Key Skills in particular are

generally negative but also varied. Marion commented in the transcript that some students have achieved the qualifications required by the vocational course, whilst other students without the required qualifications see no point in attending Key Skills classes because they do not see their relevance in relation to their vocational course. As Carol states, students prefer to concentrate on developing practical skills in the workshop as they enjoy learning practically based technical skills relevant to their own chosen vocation. Marion agrees with Carol's view as expressed in her transcript:

Well, the problem is that the people who needed.....the awful thing is that these kids can not actually write and some of them... they desperately need... in the deepest and darkest moment they know they need to improve and they seem to be vulnerable but there is no way that the Key Skills class is the... the right atmosphere to say I need help in writing assignments... it's because of the stigma... because you know, it's like.... they come to college, they think they signed for a vocational subject and all of a sudden.... and they have left the maths and English behind they could never do it anyway... that's why they have chosen a practical subject and all of a sudden made to go to Key Skills.... well that creates antagonism... and the vocational tutors don't think anything of it either, so that creates the attitude of the students and you know ... so you've got bad behaviour.... you've got lack of achievement on the Key Skills and on the vocational course, so actually what they are doing is getting them through the vocational course (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q4).

The Key Skills Coordinators imply that students resent having to attend Key Skills classes at the college, which in turn leads to disruptive or withdrawn behaviour. Marion's view is that this resentment is caused by students feeling that, having left school, they had also left Maths and English behind them. Marion continues to say that 'they could never do it (maths) anyway'.

According to the Coordinators, students in Key Skills feel that they are being forced to re-learn maths and English although some students are aware of their shortcomings with regard to their Numeracy and Literacy skills.

The general perception, however, seems to be that the lack of these skills should not prevent the students from developing the practical skills related to their vocational area. Some students alleged that they have the academic skills already as evidenced by their GCSE results. The initial diagnostic assessment carried out at the beginning of the academic year by Southlakes College, however, shows that the achievement levels in Numeracy and Literacy do not match the level they achieved in their GCSE exams.

The following table shows the comparison between the two sets of qualification and is used by tutors in order to determine students' ability:

NVQ LEVEL	GCSE EQUIVALENT
NVQ1 –Foundation Level	GCSE's grade D to E
NVQ2-Intermediate Level	GCSE's grade A to C
NVQ3-Advanced Level	AS Levels

Table 4: Qualifications equivalences

Although the qualifications in the above table do not compare exactly, it is basic Numeracy and Literacy skills which are being gauged by tutors during the initial diagnostic assessment. The following extract from Marion's transcript

highlights, as she sees it, two important factors affecting the low standards achieved in the delivery of Key Skills at Southlakes College:

1. The lack of any requirement to include Literacy skills (for instance, grammar, punctuation and spelling are ignored) when marking students' work and,
2. The alleged failure of Southlakes College to carry out the training of teaching staff to the level agreed on signing up to the Skills Pledge. As Marion articulates:

As I said before they were getting, you know... reasonable marks because they were only being marked for content in their own subject area and this is also a fault of the qualification board... as well... because in the assessment criteria there is no allusion to Literacy skills.. they don't exist in the criteria... and another thing I asked to be changed is... that in every assessment that is done there is, you know, a check for spelling, punctuation and sentence structure and text cohesion.... and I asked for that to happen for the last two years and I might be on the verge of getting people to change but obviously that causes other problems because their vocational tutors are not equipped to ... or qualified to mark... yeah... and functional skills tutors can't mark all the assignments so... another thing I had to do, but this is not going to help in any great way, is that I insisted that all staff have a Level 2 in Literacy and Numeracy. This should have been done when the principal signed up to the Key Skills pledge because the Key Skills pledge says that all employers should make sure that all of their employees have Literacy and Numeracy up to Level 2 and it wasn't done... but now it has been done but they think it's a 'tick box' thing but this is not only getting through the Literacy and Numeracy tests but they won't teach them the skills for them to be able to mark, you know, students work (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q.4).

If Marion is correct in her assertion that there is no requirement to include Literacy skills when marking students' work then the inclusion of Literacy as a component of the Key Skills programme would appear to be unnecessary, lending credence to those who hold this view. Marion also points to a failure of Southlakes College management to adhere to the spirit of the Skills Pledge by

not carrying through a programme of staff training leading to an NVQ Level 2 qualification, a minimum requirement for staff who teach Key Skills. The Skills Pledge is 'an organisation's voluntary public commitment to training its staff - in their own time and in their own way' (BIS, 2000). When employers such as Southlakes College sign up to the Skills Pledge, they commit themselves to:

- Actively encourage and support employees to gain the skills and qualifications that will meet the needs of the business and will support their future employability,
- Further support employees to acquire basic Literacy and Numeracy skills and work towards their first full Level 2 qualification and,
- Demonstrably raise employees' skills and competencies to improve their organisational performance through investing in economically valuable training and development (BIS, 2000).

In her transcript Marion expresses concern and frustration at the shortcomings of the College Key Skills programme. In order to improve the teaching and learning at the college, Marion suggests Key Skills staff need to be able to demonstrate the competence to assess students' work in Literacy and Numeracy. Marion insists that all teaching staff should achieve at least Level 2 in those two skills, for:

Currently, this not happening within the teaching staff and brings into question the fact that the college, having signed up for the Key Skills pledge, has not carried out the Policy to any significant degree (Marion, past Coordinator for Key Skills, Q.4).

The college, however, in its Key Skills Policy document, has gone beyond the minimum Level 2 requirement of the Skills Pledge, for 'all tutors delivering Key Skills will participate in a training programme of either Level 3 or 4 in Literacy and/or Numeracy' (p2). Marion, consequently alleges that, with regard to staff training, the college is not adhering to the objectives of its own Key Skills Policy or to the spirit of the Skills pledge.

5.6 Gender issues in classroom management

At Southlakes College there are marked differences in the ratio of male tutors to female tutors depending on subject area. In traditional male vocational areas (e.g. motor vehicle engineering) there are only two female tutors and twenty male tutors, whereas in Key Skills, a traditional classroom environment, there are eleven tutors of which only two are male. Marion articulates this gender difference by vocational tutors thus:

Well I suppose there might be... ehm.... you see the problem is that in some vocational areas like construction or engineering they still discipline the student with a rod of iron as they shout at them a lot and they threaten them a lot ...ehm... which possibly some female tutors can or maybe others can't, they might not agree with their approach ... but I don't know much about it in my experience really, it's what I see from the vocational areas so; from the vocational tutors and my own... and about the dominant culture of the college... well... ehm... negativity... they need to change (Marion, past Coordinator for Key Skills, Q.9).

According to Marion, despite 'the immediate authority over her classroom, women teachers tend to have a largely powerless position within the school' compared with male vocational tutors (Cunnison, 1985 in Coffey & Delamont, 2000:23). It is suggested by Cunnison that a macho culture (the use or display of physical prowess) found in many educational establishments marginalises women teachers who choose not to, or indeed cannot, wield the macho type discipline (positionally derived superiority supported by physical prowess) demanded of them. Furthermore, the authority of women teachers is usurped by students through ridicule, sexual comments and jokes over appearance, dress and position.

Coffey and Delamont suggest that some teachers use gender teasing as type of control strategy; ridiculing male pupils who misbehave by suggesting than they are acting like girls and vice-versa; urging the sexes to compete as one way of motivating both sexes; and enforcing gender stereotypes amongst the students (Coffey & Delamont, 1997:222). Against that, many female teachers would prefer to have these kind of control strategies replaced by gender justice strategies.

Gender justice, 'can be theorised as struggles to preserve the field and defend the taken for granted understandings of female and femininity as subordinate to males and masculinity within it' (Keddie & Mills, 2008:194). Keddie further comments that male tutors engaging with male students by 'reinforcing dominant constructions of gender' (Keddie & Mills, M., 1995:208) may

perpetuate the male/ female divide. In my experience, Marion's views about the gender based control strategies of male and female vocational tutors are largely due to the predominant engineering based nature of Southlakes College, itself a reflection of the gendered culture of Southlakes Town.

The ideological and political dominance of engineering tradition in the town tends to perpetuate the macho-culture (Cunnison, 1989 in Coffey & Delamont, 1997:23) experienced at the college. Despite this gender bias, Pat, the incumbent Key Skills coordinator does not perceive any difference in the ability of female tutors compared with their male counterparts in teaching 16 year old lads. Pat writes:

I don't believe that female staff are any less likely or unlikely to succeed in teaching male students. Provided there is discipline in the classroom, which is consistently managed throughout the year, then the gender of the Key Skills tutor is irrelevant. There are however a small section of the team who prefer to teach male over female students and vice versa, but that is purely a personal choice. I am a firm believer that as a teacher you should be able to teach both genders (Pat, current Coordinator of Key Skills).

Pat's comments discount the existence of a macho-culture at college which may disadvantage female tutors (Keddie & Mills M., 1995:217). Carol disputes this gender neutral view of college culture, for she said that:

As a female member of staff, you know yourself how male students frequently demonstrate various kinds of bad behaviour towards female staff..... much of which includes sexual innuendo. Whilst this is tolerated for a time by female staff.....like yourself..... It inevitably becomes harder to take as time goes on. This is a problem that each year seems to become more acute (Carol, past coordinator for Key Skills).

For some students, however, like the committed engineering apprentices, a male or a female tutor may not make any appreciable difference to their classroom attitude and behaviour. The apprentices, for instance, are required by their employer to demonstrate a personal commitment to learning since their main aim is to learn a trade and obtain work with a local prestige employer, such as the local shipyard. Any kind of misbehaviour would distract the apprentices from that aim as well as place their employment in jeopardy.

In contrast, generally, motor vehicle students' behaviour towards female tutors, according to Carol, is typified by sexual innuendo, negative attitude and incomplete workload.

The interpretations students make of the messages given by female and male staff may contribute to their motivation to learning and academic progress. Although there will always be an element of gender division, I argue that students' learning at Southlakes College, is likely to be facilitated by staff who can understand students' needs as learners through the tutors own personal dialogue and reflective practice.

Student learning at college must be linked to the individual learner's vocational orientation; enabling students to appreciate the relevance of Key Skills as well as their practical core subjects.

5.7 Students' occupational aspirations

The analyses of Coordinators in relation to students' occupational aspirations are essentially tied to class and locality. When Coordinators were asked about the impact of locality and job markets in relation to students' attitude towards education their response was:

Well... funny enough I was asking my students what they were going to do in the future the other day and very few wanted to move... I think it's a peninsular attitude but I do think that the people in the Southlakes peninsula are a bit weird anyway (lots of laughter) well I do (laughs) they do not like off comers, they don't like change, they are very eh... you know, restricted in their points of view... you know, generally are very isolated, you know, and it is a beautiful... part of the world but, you know, they don't seem to want to move outside the area....also you have to take into account the financial situation... friends, family...of course there are places where people don't want to move from an area but it is not quite intense like it is in here... I mean... I would expect that youngsters would want to get out because is so depressing and is so repressive and I would expect that the youngsters to have the get up and go and have... just to want to break out... you know... just like I did (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q.10).

Marion comes from Macclesfield where she lived and worked nearly all her life before working for a short time abroad and later joined the staff of Southlakes College in 2008. Being relatively new to Southlakes Town, Marion's views of the area and its people are less parochial, allowing her to see - in her words - 'the wider picture'. This wider picture gives her a perspective of the college, the town and its people not obvious to those who have lived in the locality all their lives. Marion is of the view that local people living in a semi-rural peninsula have a particularistic view of the world outside the local area that is relatively unchanging.

The isolation of the local people in Southlakes Town, along with no impetus for change make it difficult for local people, including the students, to visualise themselves living and working away from their family and friends. In the response to the question relating to local job opportunities, Carol comments:

Although the workforce in the local shipyard has shrunk considerably in recent years, it's still a significant local employer. The town has a number of fairly large engineering and manufacturing companies and the college provides vocational training to meet the needs of the local workforce (Carol, past Coordinator for Key Skills).

Southlakes College works in partnership with local employers with the emphasis on engineering and the service sector by tailoring courses to suit local employer demands. The local shipyard, being a large manufacturing concern, attracts applications from a large number of young students hoping to gain an apprenticeship with a prestigious employer which would give them the opportunity for long term, secure and well paid employment.

Carol, however, acknowledges that some employers are sceptical about employing young students into their workforce for the following reasons:

Many employers don't want to take people without experience in their particular field, or at least not without basic educational qualifications.....although I'm not convinced that many employers know exactly what they want (Carol, past Coordinator for Key Skills).

Carol also holds the view that although the apprentices tend to dislike Key Skills they accept it as part of their vocational course as she comments:

Generally, yes. Apprentices are in paid employment and are sent to college by their employer. Although many apprentices have a dislike for Key Skills, there is a general acceptance that Key Skills form an essential part of their vocational training. It is what the employer expects of the student so they 'grin and bear it'! Those without jobs on

the other hand don't see the relevance of Key Skills for low grade eh... labouring... ehm... types of job (Carol, past Coordinator of Key Skills).

In my view, Pat is indicating an awareness that the local shipyard symbolically retains its role as the dominant manufacturing employer, despite no longer being the mass employer of the 1980s. Pat comments:

I believe the lack of jobs in the locality does tend to affect the learners and their attitudes to study but this is not true of all learners. The fact the shipyard is one of the biggest employers has an impact if learners do not secure employment as they become disillusioned. However more and more are becoming aware of the need to improve their education to improve their chances of success in gaining employment of any kind let alone the area they are striving for (Pat, present Coordinator of Key Skills).

Perhaps the more telling part of the extract is the last two sentences. Pat's professional judgement is that students are becoming aware of the necessity to achieve qualifications to get any job, never mind the job that they want.

Undoubtedly, there is some awareness among students that well paid jobs and opportunities do exist, though mainly occupied by people in a social stratum higher than themselves, an exception perhaps being those who go on to become self employed. Whilst students from lower class strata may temporarily aspire to the kind of employment occupied by these higher classes, family and peer pressure as well as cultural norms keep them in the class and in the locality of Southlakes Town to which they are accustomed. The lack of qualifications is just another obstacle to any kind of upward mobility in terms of job prospects and opportunities. As Marion and Carol reflect:

The influence of barriers to learning in an environment, a working class environment and genders... it's all about the lack of ambition, the poor basic skills in the population, they are thinking that actually education isn't for them, ehm... They're primarily working class people went into vocational jobs didn't they?... where they didn't need to apply more academic skills such as reading and writing and maths and stuff, yes it does... still ... and there is a lot of work being done to move that on (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q.13).

The majority of the students are from a working class background and a number of them have family members who are in receipt of some kind of government benefit. This seems to create the impression in the mind of college students that money can be gained with the minimum of effort.....what I mean by that is... without the need to work. There are a large number of students receiving the E.M.A without any mandatory requirement that they actually learn (Carol, past Coordinator for Key Skills).

The present Key Skill Coordinator, Pat, is likely to feel apprehensive about making judgment in the transcript about student learning due to her personally having a dominant teacher-centered style. The lack of responses in her transcript suggests her to possibly be dismissive of the notion of the need for a new curriculum model relevant to Key Skills.

My construal from Pat's lack of comments about college management attitude is that she does not want to be unpopular amongst her superiors. Marion, however, believes that a lot needs to be changed at Southlakes College if students are to succeed in education and work:

I think we are exam factories and education has gone out of the window and is having an effect on teaching... we have seen the teachers here how demoralised they are and how much teacher led we do and we are trying to redress that by using critical skills and by, you know, recreating activities but you know it's demoralising. At the end of the day they have to get the learners through, ehm, as one person said to me

‘you know, it’s all very well these activities but we don’t have time for activities because we have to get through so much stuff and that is a general attitude of the teachers which is totally missing the point but that is learning in this day and age that is what is going on... and all you can do is change your own practice, and the practice of others you can influence to some extent (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q.13).

Marion is clearly concerned about the teaching and learning standards at Southlakes College and how - in her view wrongly - Southlakes College values the importance placed on exam success.

The College teaches students only enough to pass the Key Skills exams rather than providing students with all of the skills needed for successful transition into the workplace. Marion emphasises that the teaching is currently ‘teacher led’. When she suggests creating activities to make teaching more ‘student led’, tutors complained that the current college curriculum does not allow time to develop and implement new activities. Marion’s aspirations for improving the teaching and learning at Southlakes College are unlikely to be realised in the short term as she comments:

I am expecting a redundancy any time... I mean, you know, I don’t get on with my manager, he stops everything you know every thought and I am the last in aren’t I? ... well I am expecting it because they have asked for voluntary redundancies and I don’t think they got many volunteers because they are trying to get redundancies at a reduced amount for a shorter time (Marion, past Coordinator of Key Skills, Q.6).

At the time of analysing the Coordinators transcripts Southlakes College announced that Marion’s position was ‘dissolved’. Consequently, Marion was made redundant.

5.8 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to analyse the spoken and written comments made by the three Key Skills Coordinators. The Coordinators, past and present, articulated a general agreement about the attitude of students towards Key Skills. Their views of the staff fed back into the perceptions of teaching and learning held about the college, staff and the students. In my view, many of the concerns held by the Coordinators are well founded and deep-rooted.

A deconstruction and exposure of these values and beliefs may allow the teaching staff to gain an understanding of where the college as well as the students are coming from. In this way, the deconstruction and exposure of this research may contribute also to a learning oriented college in which individual capabilities and strengths are celebrated and recognised within a wider framework that takes into account the understanding of students' needs and motivation, achievement and inclusion.

6. Chapter Six: A research review and personal reflection

6.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a research review focused upon the role of discourse within the student and Coordinators of Key Skill perceptions of education and work. This chapter subsequently provides the opportunity to use the knowledge that I have gained from the results of this investigation in order to reflect on the main outcomes of the research. This research takes into consideration the diversity of students' approaches to learning which are dependent on each individual's educational orientation and motivation for learning. The research also recognises the need for a review of the current Key Skills provision in order to engage students in education and to provide relevant and meaningful learning to young male adults who wish to follow a vocational career.

6.2 A research review

As we have seen, the aim of the research primarily was to discover how the young adults in the target population understand the world of work, their relationship to that world, and subsequent implications for and experience of, Key Skills in vocational education. At the start of wide range vocational courses, many further education students ask the teacher the question 'Why do I have to do Key Skills?' This early rebellion suggests to me that those students' attitudes towards education in general and towards Key Skills in particular were formed prior to their entering college. Consequently, it was necessary to research their biographies prior to entering college. The research is based upon two groups of students, these being N.V.Q (National Vocational Qualification)

Level 1 Motor Vehicle (non-employer based) and N.V.Q. (National Vocational Qualification) Level 2 employed modern apprentices in engineering as well as senior members of staff at Southlakes College.

The research questions initially helped to refine my research ideas and to underline the importance of the diversity of students' orientation and motivation to learning. The research questions also helped to determine to what degree students are willing to assume their role in the learning process and to what extent teachers of Key Skills and senior members of staff are able to motivate students to engage them in the learning process, success of which would be show when:

- 1) Students see the relevance of what they are doing;
- 2) Students engage with the information provided by their tutors;
- 3) Through positive verbal and written assessment students are able to reflect on their own work and are able to move forward in the learning process;
- 4) Students recognise their part in the learning process and that it is meaningful to them;
- 5) Tutors use different strategies and approaches to teaching in the context and content of the learning experience;
- 6) Students are encouraged by the tutors to work to the best of their abilities.

Chapter two presented a conceptual framework for the research in terms of existing literature and previous research. The literature research led to exploring four perspectives which encompass a direct reference to my investigation. These were:

- 1) Aspects of social class,
- 2) Aspects of locality,
- 3) Aspects of masculinities
- 4) Key Skills background and development in post 16 education.

A critical realist methodology and discourse analysis was used in this investigation to explore the relationship between social structures and discourses and how people position and reposition themselves through the use of language, in spite of the extent to which those students do or do not recognise those background factors at play.

The data collection methods (see Chapter 3) were focus groups and personal interviews with students, supplemented by interviews with three past and present Coordinators of Key Skills Coordinators. I used the biographical method of qualitative research as opposed to the written language - with the exception of two written statements of two motor vehicle students - in the representation of individuals' biographies. In this investigation, biographical research created the possibility of a broader understanding of the interplay

between the students and social forces that appear to be beyond one's ability to control, for:

‘To understand how a person thinks, acts, feels and understands how and what they know, it is necessary to understand the relationships and tensions between the context and individual life, not only now but in the past’ (Butt, Raymond, & Yamagishi, 1988:99).

This quote implies that biography provides an understanding of what makes students “tick” in the context of the research topic, for:

‘Telling the story of the self, as autobiography does, always assumes a certain kind of subject –what I shall call the “self of the story”. Autobiography itself has more than one story to tell about itself although the most common form tends to be a humanistic story in which the self is invested as a sovereign, unified, rational subject - the source of knowledge and representation’ (Usher, 1988:19).

In this research the histories of students’ lives revealed a systematic pattern occurring in the experiences and circumstances of individuals, both individually and as a group with common backgrounds, experiences and cultures.

The concept of personal truthfulness serves as an important contribution to the reliability and validity of students’ narratives, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:11) as did the triangulation of data analysis outcomes. As a result, Chapter 4 presented the analysis of the data from two groups of students.

The Students were also asked to reflect on their own educational experiences and family background, though the realist analysis went beyond their utterances to construct an understanding based upon social class, masculinity and locality.

Chapter 5 focused on the analysis of the transcripts of senior members of Southlakes College teaching staff in Key Skills. Teaching staff were asked to state and reflect on their own professional views regarding the work-related educational needs of the students and the way in which Key Skills within vocational education satisfies those needs.

6.3 Personal reflection

This research revealed the existence of an issue in relation to how low achievers in education were differentiated by F.E course at the time of enrolment. When students follow the enrolment procedure at Southlakes College, they attend an interview with a career path in mind and the consequent course on which they should be enrolled, taking into account their previous academic qualifications. The vocational course (e.g. motor vehicle engineering) is normally explained to a prospective student but staff very seldom give an insight or explain in detail what students may expect in the curriculum, including Key Skills.

Currently, the college bases course choice upon prior GCSE results, stated career preferences and the existence (or not) of a current employer (e.g. students enrolling upon apprenticeships). For many non-apprenticeship students, disappointment awaits when, on attending college interviews and

assessment sessions, they discover that their preferred career course is over-subscribed and that a second, third, or even fourth choice of career, has to be made. This mismatch of preference with course choice often results in students being channelled onto a course not of their choosing, such as motor vehicle or engineering, when their first choice may be something totally different, such as bricklaying or painting and decorating.

In the research, parental labour market experience played an important part in student career and course choices. This outcome suggested that there are important factors in the students' social and cultural backgrounds (Connolly & Healy, 2004) 'pushing' or 'constraining' how make their minds up when they choose a course. That is, as noted in Chapter 4, the image that students have of themselves along with the kind of job they feel they should aim for, is often influenced by family expectations, particularly those students from a lower to middle class background. I cannot, however, assume that in all cases, students aspirations are influenced by their families; neither can I reject such aspects as social capital which can affect directly occupational chances and forms of support in order to allow others to accomplish their objectives and to acquire different opportunities in life (Adler & Kwon, 2001; Bourdieu, 1986; Gibson, et al., 2004:21; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). Although the students demonstrated an understanding of the need for qualifications in order to find employment, their actual college based behaviour, including their attitude to learning in Key Skills, militates against any chance of gaining such qualifications.

The study also revealed that family support and experience of education and work acted as role models in students' environment. Peer pressure, also, may have had an increasing influence on students which may have moulded their views and attitudes about education and work opportunities. As young men developed they may have begun to be aware of class difference and that there are groups outside their own family and class stratum where better paid job opportunities exist. Family and peer group pressure, along with the awareness of their own educational shortcomings bring them back to the reality of their social position where the thought of attempting to embark on a career path that is at variance with their family or peer group is an unrealistic proposition.

The parents of the motor vehicle students, not having had a skilled job themselves and having left school with minimal or no qualifications, did not know enough about the current educational qualification system to be able to give proper advice to their children with regard to further education and jobs. Lack of jobs in the area is an increasing problem to the degree that there is little likelihood of school leavers being able to commence work straight from secondary school or find an apprenticeship.

This research has also indicated that students are reluctant to study Key Skills as they feel that they already have the necessary skills to a sufficient level in order to accomplish and make progress in their vocational course. Many of the students, were of the opinion that they, in effect, were 'treading water' and being held back whilst at college as they had done much of the 'stuff'

(including Key Skills) before whilst at senior school. Indeed, a number of students were of the belief that they had the skills already. For those students that did not already have Key Skill capacities, the desire to acquire them would be almost non-existent. The students frequently complain that they “can’t do fractions”, “can’t do percentages” or they “can’t write letters or do assignments”. The challenge for those who did claim exemption from Key Skills would be to demonstrate that they do indeed have these skills as what they say often cannot be taken at face value. With some students further difficulties are encountered when assignments show a lack of the very skills for which they have claimed exemption.

This research has shown also that students prefer to attend practical sessions, that is, sessions delivered in the workshop as opposed to attending theory lessons in a classroom. Motor vehicle students and apprentices are likely to learn practically, using their hands, as it is relevant for their own vocational area. In order to address issues of student career needs, aspirations and motivation to learning, it is necessary to look at alternative models of teaching and learning Key Skills. A different model of teaching Key Skills may involve adopting a different approach to learning thereby making Key Skills relevant to students by embedding skills in their occupational areas.

In order for any change to take place in students’ attitudes towards work and education, some tangible connection between Key Skills, the way in which Key Skills is being taught and their future employment, must be introduced to make

Key Skills more relevant. The way Key Skills currently are being delivered creates a resistance on the part of students to respond more positively than they did in school. Often, students are disappointed to find such a large element of academic work rather than the work based learning they were expecting. Consequently, resistance builds very quickly to the academic subjects such as Key Skills making it difficult for the learner to be engaged in education. Those students who did well at school, such as the apprentices, seem to mentally adapt to the college curriculum and accept that academic work is an essential part of their vocation training. Motor vehicle students, on the other hand need support to be able to deal with the college demands including connecting with academic subjects such as Key Skills with their vocational course.

At the same time, one encounters many situations whereby some students start a college course with qualifications in excess of the level of our Key Skills provision. Ideally, differentiation should see that those students are either given an exemption from the need to do Key Skills provided, as previously stated, they have sufficient evidence to allow them to claim such exemption. Students may be given different or, in some cases, more demanding work to do as to not to 'turn them off' or cause them to feel that they are being held back by not being placed at the right level. In practise, however, at Southlakes College, there is insufficient diagnostic testing and analysis of the same in order to allow that degree of differentiation to take place.

6.4 Coordinators of Key Skills and their views

The research in relation to senior members of staff in Key Skills - past and present - revealed concerns about students' lack of commitment and their unwillingness to engage in the learning process associated with Key Skills. All senior staff members interviewed agreed that students are apprehensive about Key Skills and would prefer, if they had the choice, not to attend Key Skills sessions. The Coordinators also noted that social class, masculinity and locality have an impact on students' orientations to learning. Their orientations to employment and college work is not helped by the decreasing demand for engineering occupations in the town, for engineering still has an ideological dominance in the town.

Staff members continue to view their role as providers of information and expect all students to achieve a full award which involves not only the completion of portfolio work but also passing their exams in order to raise retention and achievement statistics year on year. At least one Coordinator was prepared to comment that vocational and Key Skills staffs are prepared to do almost anything to make sure that students are able to achieve a pass in their examinations. One final comment from a past Key Skills coordinator (Marion) reveals this attitude;

‘we have turned into an exam factory’.

To this comment, I would add, ‘no matter what’.

To at least address some of these issues, students' learning should be facilitated by Southlakes College, with vocational areas and the Key Skills department by providing learning opportunities congruent to the students' needs. When these conditions are met students may be in the position to move forward from a position of receiver of information to that of an active reflective learner. A reflective learner (Schön, 1983) explores their own experiences of learning, throughout a questioning approach, to better understand how they learn and with the outlook to improving their further learning.

6.5 The way forward

In carrying out the research, I have been able to reflect about my own teaching practices. The way that I teach Key Skills has changed as a result of my research. Previous to this investigation, my preferred teaching approach was to incorporate Key Skills as far as is possible within the vocational courses. I have always tried to encourage autonomous learning which means that students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Whilst carrying out the research, I began to question the term 'Key Skills' and how this term is being used as a synonym for 'transferable skills' as well as their relevance to a wide range of vocational programmes delivered at the Southlakes College. Naively, my approach to Key Skills was to provide students with a set of Numeracy, Literacy and I.C.T skills, as prescribed in the College Key Skills Policy document (see Appendix A7) in order to facilitate the smooth transition from college to the work place.

At the beginning of my career as a Tutor of Key Skills, the aim of a typical lesson taught by me was to check students' understanding of a particular topic (in Numeracy, Literacy or I.C.T), what skills required for the students to apply and what students should know and understand about a particular skill. One of the Numeracy skills students need to learn and/or apply, for instance, is how to calculate percentages.

Previously, in a normal lesson, I used to provide students with a handout, explained mathematical concepts in relation to the use of percentages in order to effect a successful outcome, paying little attention to other factors affecting student learning such as previous educational experiences and social/family background. Before long, I increasingly felt the need to analyse and reflect on the way I taught Key Skills as my approach to teaching and learning made students reluctant - year on year - to attend Key Skills. Consequently, I became conscious of my need to investigate and review how educational processes - such as the incorporation of Key Skills into vocational teaching - and how social, gender and locality issues influenced the way people learn. I felt also the need to explore which Key Skills are needed in order to improve individuals' personal skills for future employment and to analyse students' perceptions of learning and how these affect the way in which Key Skills was taught. I also realised that some students may show good Literacy skills but at the same time may not be as good in Numeracy skills or vice versa. As a result, I discovered that it was possible for each student to have different profiles and

to perform at different levels in Literacy and Numeracy depending upon task and context.

As result of this research, my views about the teaching and learning of Key Skills have been considerably transformed. I have been developing a new resource bank with worksheets relevant to each vocational area in order to give students more meaningful and interesting exercises in which Key Skills appear to be more relevant to each subject area and are task oriented. This approach, however, has been difficult to implement due to the lack of dedicated classroom space in the workshop areas and rooms with computers. Whilst I understand that the new building taking place at Southlakes College should make that task easier, the completion of the new building is some three years away. Key Skills staff have to attempt to move student perceptions of Key Skills away from the subject being perceived purely as an academic subject which was perceived as dull, uninteresting and irrelevant to students. Concurrently, I extended my reading to include the writings of Keddie & Mills (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009) who has carried out a great deal of research into gender justice and the teaching of boys. Whilst my attempt to embed Key Skills into vocational areas and to improve my teaching and learning skills has achieved some success, progress is slow, as Keddie & Mills (2007) point out:

‘In an era where teachers are often expected to do “more with less”, teachers are often looking for ‘quick fix’ solutions to the ‘problem of boys’. In terms of enhancing boys’ educational outcomes, while we certainly acknowledge that there is no such thing as a quick fix, we also acknowledge the clear need for more effective translations of critical theory for teachers working on the ground’ (emphasis by the author) (Keddie & Mills, 2007:19).

One of the general principles of the Southlakes College Key Skills Policy is 'To ensure Key Skills supports all students to achieve their full potential in their vocational area' (p.2) but does not state how Key Skills staff should carry out the general principles of the Policy. My belief is that the staff at Southlakes College should embrace the concept of embedding of Key Skills into all vocational areas, working closely with vocational tutors, using relevant practical materials thereby meeting personal students' needs. All staff involved in the delivery of Key Skills at Southlakes College need to adopt the same approach in order to achieve uniformity and raise educational standards. According to the staff interviewed, there remain issues, however, about students' lack of commitment and their unwillingness to take some degree of responsibility for their own learning. Lack of self-discipline, disruptive behaviour and sexism create problems, particularly so with young males.

The College Policy allows all staff members to adopt an individual approach in dealing with these problems but lack of cohesion across the college militates against improvement. A coordinated approach, whereby all Key Skills staff agree at the start of each academic year on how college discipline should be managed would, I believe, be the best way forward. Students would then know what was expected of them and also what they could expect from College staff. Because of my research into key aspects such as locality, masculinity, social class and job markets, I found that by actively involving students in my research through the use of focus groups and interviews, I gave students a feeling of importance and that their views were valued. Student self esteem and

ambitions come into play when they make decisions about education and work (Ball, et al., 2000; Bloomer & Hodgkinson, 2000) and these decisions may include elements of discontinuity, unreliability and serendipity as well as being pressured or facilitated by class, gender, family and friends. Support from teaching staff will help learners to explore their feelings and aspirations taking into account students' lived realities. Some learners, however, will necessitate more preparation time than others and will require many opportunities to learn about the choices that are available to them.

6.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have reflected on the data findings and particular themes in order to support my arguments. The basis for certain interpretations may not always be obvious from the responses given therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that in addition to interviews with students and senior staff, interpretations are made on the basis of interaction with my students, interactions with the Key Skills team and my experience as a teacher. In my experience and that of my fellow Key Skills tutors most students tend to dislike Key Skills. In addition there is a mismatch between government expectations and that of student voice, and the causes of the mismatch is a problem that my research is attempting to address. There is a need, therefore, for a new approach to teaching and learning and a review of the Key Skills model in order to keep students engaged in education.

7. Chapter Seven: The research experience, reflective practice and learning from research

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by highlighting my contributions to knowledge and subsequently suggesting some potential directions for future research. It includes my own reflections on my experiences as a keen, high achieving, lifelong learning female middle class teacher who enjoys theoretical discussion but who has to teach concrete thinking to reticent frequently foul-mouthed low achieving male working class lads who see learning as something they do at school and stop thereafter.

Consequently, the demands upon Further Education by the government result in a tension between the facilitation of Key Skills and students' backgrounds and approach to learning.

7.2 Reflection in practice

As result of my research experience I have gained new knowledge and understanding to the question of 'Why students have to do Key Skills?'.

The research process proved to be challenging. The investigation involved the students' own perceptions about education and work. Throughout my investigation, however, I felt acutely involved in the experience of research itself, including the opportunity to step back and reflect in a critical way.

My reflections about my research work are organised around three areas of interest:

- 1) Subject knowledge,
- 2) An understanding of the social aspects of students which influenced their sets of values and vocational orientations and,
- 3) Research methodology and the analysis of data.

I became aware of the above three factors with direct reference to my study sample. These are the aspects of social class, aspects of masculinities, aspects of locality, Key Skills and its development. On reflection this investigation exposed the existence of sets of values; the values held by the students and the values held by the staff. The data findings in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 5 revealed that senior staff and tutors of Key Skills need to develop a new Key Skills model for teaching Key Skills with the emphasis on student needs, negotiation of tasks; embedded in and relevant to their own subject area. Students need to see the relevance of the tasks set out by their tutors of Key Skills and these (tutors) should provide meaningful verbal, written and self assessment clearly explained to students so they (students) are able to 'move up a level'.

I anticipate that during the next few academic years my teaching practice will change towards student becoming more active and reflective learners rather than just receivers of information provided by the tutor. I will try to negotiate

the scheme of work including weekly numeracy and literacy tasks with my students and come to an agreement in order to move forward during that year. In this way, the learners hopefully will be aware of the existing criteria for achieving Key Skills and feel part of the learning process. I also intend to carry out focus groups at least once a term in order to find out students' perceptions about their vocational course and in particular their progress in Key Skills. Individual learning logs showing students' short term targets may also maintain students focused on task.

I believe, however, that in order to improve practice there needs to be a reciprocal understanding by staff and students of the aims, objectives and rationale of the programme of Key Skills. Meaningful learning will require a deconstruction and a re-conceptualisation of the existing model of Key Skills and of the Key Skills programme. On reflection, the current Key Skills model of education aims only at the minimum grades required for students to achieve 'a pass level'.

The: 'that's not bad' and the 'you just need to get through the test' current approach does not provide the learner with the necessary knowledge, skills and encouragement to be able to transfer those skills into the workplace or into everyday life. The findings of my investigation suggest the need for an evolving Key Skills model taking into account key factors including;

- 1) Students' educational and social background, needs, choice of career, goals and ambitions for the future;
- 2) Students' understanding of the relevance of Key Skills within their own subject area;
- 3) Key Skills embedded and taught within their own curriculum area, i.e.: students' workshops;
- 4) The importance of the effect of teaching style matching the learner preferences and target setting for students using individual learning plans;
- 5) Ongoing assessment and positive verbal and written feedback in order to encourage students' motivation to achieve with the view to entering the workforce; and,
- 6) Promoting independent learners in order to take responsibility for their own learning where tutor occupies the role of facilitator rather than an enforcer.

Although these points raise a number of curriculum issues, some of which have been highlighted by Chadha (2006) and Bolton & Hyland (2003) the key factors mentioned above would at least result in students starting the new academic year from a position of strength rather than weakness.

7.3 Contributions to knowledge

The work and examples shown in this thesis suggested that students' orientation, educational values and future work opportunities are manifested in the language and discourses used to communicate in as well as understand their

world. The study findings suggest contributions to knowledge and these can be summarised as follows:

1. Background factors contribute significantly towards a student's attitude to education (social class, family background and their experience of education and masculinity issues); and,
2. Factors in college mentioned in previous chapters that obstruct the learning rather than helping students to achieve their goals in education and work including meaningful learning through a new Key Skills model.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

This research provided an account of some of the issues surrounding students' experiences and own version of their realities in relation to work and education and in particular to Key Skills. Further research should focus on the following themes:

- Target setting with pupils, bearing in mind students educational and social/family background together with their needs, their expectations and differentiation of levels and aptitude;
- The role of the teacher in their delivery of Key Skills and their ability to differentiate students abilities;
- The role of the teacher in understanding pupil achievements and inclusion for planning and assessing Key Skills;
- The role of the management in supporting the above key areas;

- Suggestions for an improved teaching and learning model by providing a new rationale for change in which such benefits may be realised.

7.5 Limitations to this study

One of the limitations is to be aware (Bell, 1993) over questions that ask for information that the respondent may not know, and to remember that research is dependent on the goodwill and availability of subjects. Limitations of data from interviews may relate to the problems attributed to recording procedures and the risk of introducing distortions and making errors in the findings that would need explanation (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995:171). Another limitation factor is the response effect which, according to Borg (1981) is attributed to factors such as:

- The eagerness of the respondent to please the interviewer, or
- A vague antagonism that sometimes arises between interviewer and respondent, or
- The tendency of the interviewer to seek out answers that support his/her preconceived notions.

These factors above needed to be minimised during the collection and analysis of the data gained in this investigation so that they do not cause bias in the findings and objectivity (Borg, 1981) was maintained as the main aim.

7.6 Conclusions

This research has indicated that students are more likely to engage in the learning process when it is relevant, meaningful and conducive to a reflective approach to learning. In order to develop a new teaching and learning approach in Key Skills it is necessary to understand the realities the students posed and how language meaning and students' values are ingrained in discourses. The findings in this research also show that students' perceptions about learning are directly linked to the values and goals of the students themselves and the people involved such as teachers, coordinators and management of the college. All of these aspects contribute to the culture and ethos of the college.

Further research applied to the findings of this research would be beneficial as I feel there is scope for a more comprehensive study of the role of young male adults - 'the lads' - who wish to follow a vocational course. In order to understand complex interactions, additional research in discovering the ways in which post 16 students make sense of education through discourse would also be advantageous with the aim of improving teaching and learning in further education.

I expect the readers of this thesis to use their own experiences and use their own reality as the basis for judgement. This thesis, also, may represent students' own realities and experiences in education and could offer the basis for further research.

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ANNEX

A1

Meeting criteria checklist

MEETING CRITERIA	TICK (IF CHECKED)	COMMENTS
ORGANISE THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE STUDENTS IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY AS IT WILL BE DONE IN THE MAIN STUDY.	√	THE INTERVIEWS WERE ED AS PLANNED.
IDENTIFY AMBIGUITIES AND DIFFICULT QUESTIONS.	√	COMMENTS WERE NOTED BY HAND AND ALL AUDITS WERE CHECKED 3-5 TIMES. FEEDBACK WAS WRITTEN BESIDE EACH OF THE QUESTIONS.
RECORD THE TIME TAKEN TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND DECIDE WHETHER IT IS REASONABLE.	√	THE INTERVIEWS TOOK ABOUT 1 HOUR. PERHAPS THIS IS TOO LONG. WILL NEED TO REVISE THEM WITH MY SUPERVISOR
REMOVE ALL UNNECESSARY, DIFFICULT OR AMBIGUOUS QUESTIONS.	√	IN ANDREW'S INTERVIEW, SECTION 2: FAMILY OCCUPATIONS, QUESTION 5. HOW WOULD YOU HAVE FELT IF YOUR PARENTS WERE NOT WORKING? HAS BEEN DELETED. ALSO IN SECTION 3: FAMILY ACHIEVEMENTS UP TO DATE, QUESTION 8 HAS BEEN CHANGED FROM THIS: "DO YOU THINK THAT IS THERE ANY WAY THAT YOUR FAMILY CAN SHOW THE BENEFITS OF EDUCATION?" TO THIS: "IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DO YOU THINK EDUCATION HAS HELPED YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS GETTING AND HOLDING ONTO JOBS?"
ASSESS WHETHER EACH QUESTION GIVES AN ADEQUATE RANGE OF RESPONSES FOR THE PURPOSE OF MY MAIN RESEARCH AIM.	√	COMMENTS WERE NOTED BY HAND AND ALL AUDITS WERE CHECKED 3 TIMES. FEEDBACK WAS WRITTEN BESIDE EACH OF THE QUESTIONS.
ESTABLISH THAT REPLIES CAN BE INTERPRETED IN TERMS OF THE INFORMATION THAT IS REQUIRED	√	COMMENTS WERE NOTED BY HAND AND ALL AUDITS WERE CHECKED 3 TIMES. FEEDBACK WAS WRITTEN BESIDE EACH OF THE QUESTIONS.
CHECK THAT ALL QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED	√	ALL QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED.
RE-WORD ANY QUESTIONS THAT ARE NOT ANSWERED AS EXPECTED.	√	AS WHEN NEEDED.
REVISE THE QUESTIONS AGAINST THE ANALYSIS OF THE AUDITS AND AGAIN.	√	SECOND INTERVIEW (ANDREW'S) HAS BEEN REVISED/ADAPTED/CHANGED FOLLOWING THE FIRST INTERVIEW (NATHAN'S).

A2

Student focus group schedule

Question 1

What was secondary school like for you?

Question 2

What effect, if any, did secondary school have on your job intentions?

Question 3

Did you have a work placement at school? If so, what effect did it have on your job intentions?

Question 4

Who had the most effect upon the decision to enrol onto a Motor Vehicle course beside yourself?

Question 5

What do you know about job opportunities in Southlakes Town and surrounding areas?

5a) Looking into the future, what ambitions do you have about the type of work you want to have?

5b) Will this involve you moving away from Southlakes Town?

Question 6

What, if anything, are you getting out of coming to college?

6a) What about Key Skills as part of your experiences? Do you think you need them?

Question 7

How important are educational qualifications in helping you to find work now and in the future?

7a) Do you see yourselves carrying on and doing more qualifications for work later on?

Well, thank you very much for that. I really appreciate it, it does help me a lot but just to re assure you again, I would not use your names in any way at all, so please remember that. Thank you.

A3

Student focus group transcript

Transcription of Focus Group – Nothern Engineering Company apprentices YEAR 1

Date: 20th of March 2009

Time: 9am – Room Phil6

Group: Nothern Engineering Company Systems apprentices Year 1.

Transcript conventions

Image	Meaning
(.) pause.	i.e. a few seconds silence
(2)	Timed pause in seconds
Sto.	Full stop indicates unfinished word
(Inaudible)	Indicates speech that can't be deciphered at all
//.....//	Indicates overlapping – use for both speakers and place one overlap directly underneath the other
...	Sentence appeared not to be finished
Underlined	Indicates ' <u>repeating patterns of ideas</u> ' in order to create a theme.
(A. Q.)	Apprentices Question x
(M.V. Q.)	Motor Vehicle Question x

Table 3: Transcript Conventions created by Viviana Hopkinson.

Question 1

What was secondary school like for you?

Phil: It was good but not as good as the college exactly

[inaud talks]

Gary: //In school you don't have
the same time as you have in the college, there is more spare time at the college
to do your own work//

Euan: //I think school was ok//

Phil: I'm enjoying college more...

Luke: //School was alright
but I prefer college to be honest//

Euan: //but I like the college now because you feel like more like an adult working environment//

William: I think school is good because you see more of your friends, but I like the college because you do more things and is more interesting than school...

Oliver: Secondary school was good I think...

Stuart: I think senior school was good because you can see more of your friends but college is better, more interesting...

David: //You got to see more of your friends in senior school...watching going separate ways, you know what I mean... is more interesting... college is a better environment and stuff like that//

Oliver: College is a lot better because you do more interesting things than school work

Question 2

What effect, if any, did secondary school have on your job intentions?

David: I went to the Sixth Form College first then I came here so I chose to come here so really it was my own choice to change careers...

Euan: //Her... I always wanted to do something in ehr... in engineering and the work I did in senior school in engineering subjects made me want to take it

[inaud talks]

Phil: //Well, I decided what I wanted to do (.) basically because the subject I liked made me go in to that type of business, into that subject... if you know what I mean...//

William: I choose engineering as an option in school and (.) th... I liked it so I wanted to carry on at the college

Oliver: My old school... didn't have anything to do with engineering but I was quite interested in engineering so I chosen to do it at the college... so it was my own choice...

Gary: //Eher... I always knew what I wanted to do when I went to secondary school I always knew that I wanted to do this sort of work... so the secondary school didn't have that much effect really...//

Stuart: //Well my dad and my granddad like...(.) have been into Nothern Engineering Company like doing all the engineering like and stuff all their lives so it's like me just carrying on...

Luke: School decided my future... so it did... did have an impact in my job intentions...

Question 3

Did you have a work placement at school? If so, what effect did it have on your job intentions?

Gary: Ehm... I did work placement in Nothern Engineering Company so yeah... (2) that was one of the main reasons why I wanted to go to Nothern Engineering Company in itself.

Stuart: I was in agricultural engineering like down there... just like working with all the tractors and stuff and just got more and more interested in from there... that's...what... I started from there really...

Euan: //I did two weeks work placement in Nothern Engineering Company but it was with the health and safety manager... so... so I didn't enjoy it (3) but I'm doing something different now and it's more engineering stuff//

Phil: I had work placement at a building and so it really didn't have much effect what I've done in engineering... but I enjoyed it as it was.

William: I got work placement at the Gas Terminal doing some gas fitting and gas appliances like boilers and that ... (2) I

really enjoyed it and I wanted to become a Corgi Registered gas man but I think it's really hard to get jobs...

[inaud talks]

Oliver: //I did a plumbing course for my work placement but it didn't have any effect on the job I took on now regarding the engineering side//

Luke: I got two weeks at Nothern Engineering Company placement so that... ehm... that (2) helped me a lot to make a decision about what I wanted to do in future.

David: //I went to a body repair job... at the local garage... and then I decided to take this course after.//

Question 4

Who had the most effect upon the decision to enrol onto your chosen course beside yourself?

Phil: I think my mum and dad had a bit of an effect there because also they wanted me to do something I want to do which is what I am doing now which you know makes me to do it even more... And just... to please my mum and stuff cos' I want to do it as well (2) and my teachers at old school also wanted me to do it...

Gary: Other than myself... like a few members of my family actually did engineering as well like my uncle ... a few of my cousins... so that's why I wanted to do it...

Euan: It was mostly my teachers and my careers advisers but mostly my parents

Luke: For me...my parents I think... and teachers at school.

William: My mum was my main influence and she made me go to college... and I wanted to come as well to college (3) wanted me to get somewhere local like Nothern Engineering Company was a good choice.

Question 5

What do you know about job opportunities in Southlakes Town and surrounding areas?

Oliver: With having more...well...like... building more submarines... there is going to be more work in the area... there are even coming from all over to take the jobs from outside the town...

Stuart: //There are quite a few jobs in the town... but you need to be really looking for them//

[inaud talks]

Gary: //Well...there is actually jobs in this area but you need to have the qualifications...(2) like A's and B's and stuff like that...so (2) you need to be well qualified to get the few jobs that are around... I think...

Euan: Well there are a few small firms in Southlakes Town apart from Nothern Engineering Company... there is (2) Kimberley Clarke and that...

William: There are quite a few jobs in Southlakes Town because it's an industrial town... but there are so many people out of work that makes it even harder to get a job...

Phil: There is a lot of job opportunities in this area... well but in my choice there is a bit but not as much as there should be... not too many jobs apart from Nothern Engineering Company.

David: There are a few jobs here but not as many as other places in the country like offshore and places like that.

Luke: //I agree...you got Nothern Engineering Company and Kimberley Clarke and... so there are jobs in the area//

[inaud talks]

5a) Looking into the future, what ambitions do you have about the type of work you want to have?

Phil: I would like to be a successful engineer you know... and earn good money... which I don't think is a bad ambition.

Gary: Well I want to earn good money obviously but more than that I want a job for life in the yard... (2) and then do it for the next forty years maybe because it's what I enjoy Do motor vehicle and do something with sports like... something like that... I think.

Euan: // I'd like to be an engineer in the air force... want do to that for a few years and gain some experience// .

Luke: I just want to be a successful engineer in industry and work in the yard.

[inaud talks]

Oliver: Well I want to become a successful engineer like with me trade then progress to higher levels throughout my career.

Stuart: //Well like, do me time with my apprenticeship//

David: Just be a successful electrical engineer really.

William: I want to do this apprenticeship scheme, get a trade behind me... (2) and then get a job in the yard because once you get your trade behind ye you can go anywhere really... you can have a job for life.

5b) Will this involve you moving away from Southlakes 'Town?

Euan: When I get to year 4 I want to move to Lancaster and after I finish my training perhaps then I would like to travel all over the world.

[inaud talks]

William: //I'm happy to stay here, but I would consider moving away and working off shore or something like that//

Oliver: I want to stay round where my local... and my village is... I wouldn't like to move out of Southlakes Town.

Phil: //No, I just want to be here in this town because I got everything I need.//

Gary://Yeah... I am the same I wanna stay in Southlakes Town... I wouldn't like to move anywhere else

Stuart: //I really wanna stay in Southlakes where my friends are... I don't think I would like to move away from the town//

Luke: I'm happy to stay here... in the local area

David: I wouldn't mind staying round here but if work forced me to do it I would move out of the town I think...

[inaud talks]

Question 6

What, if anything, are you getting out of coming to college?

David: Gaining all your qualifications all Key Skills and skills you are going to need in the future like

Phil: Getting my NVQ Level 2 (laughs) obviously... but... ehm... also gaining friends hopefully learning different things

[inaud talks]

Luke: I'm gaining more knowledge in engineering, and how to do stuff... and life skills...

Oliver: You are gaining life skills that you are gonna to take in everyday life... in the future as well as taking your NVQ 2 to the next level...

Stuart: Well, it's like getting new friends new people and all your qualifications and your qualifications you are going to need to get a job and stuff like that

Gary: //Life skills, that's basically why we are here like setting us off, gaining confidence and what our job is... everything// .

Euan: //Learning how to do my job and getting everyday life skills//

William: //Education, you are learning all the time when you are in the workshop and stuff like that... you are getting better at it so you would be better when you are going into a job if you know what I mean...//

[inaud talks]

6a) What about Key Skills as part of your experiences? Do you think you need them?

[inaud talks]

Gary: I'd say you may have to do it but I wouldn't compare it with what you do at the workshop, because the stuff we do in Key Skills is the same as what we did in school... what we learn in here we have already done it... so we already have the experience but what we do in the workshop is different... it's new every day

Euan: Key Skills itself is essential but I would say it's that important... because I did really well in school I didn't need to do any exams... I got my GSCE's C and above... all of them I completed my work quite quickly... unlike other people.

[inaud talks]

Oliver: Well like I said, in Key Skills you are gaining more knowledge so yeah I think it's good... but you shouldn't have to do it if you got the grades already... only if you need to boost your grades up I think...

Phil: I think you should be able to choose if you want to do Key Skills... is just that sometimes we have nothing to do...

Stuart: It's important for the employers to know that you got the Key Skills but also the work in the workshop is more important... because if you can't do the work in the workshop then you can't do this course if you know what I mean...

David: Just the same thing... only if you really need them... I got all my qualifications so I shouldn't have to do them...

Luke: I think Key Skills is a good idea, because if you didn't get any GCSE's in school you didn't do the job you want you got second chance to do your Key Skills cos' probably... they probably see Key Skills as English GCSE if you haven't got that then or whatever GCSE you haven't got because you've done a test in Key Skills and stuff like that...

William: They are pointless cos' we've done all this in school like... in the GCSE's... like Maths and stuff... and we've got to do it all over again...

[inaud talks]

Question 7

How important are educational qualifications in helping you to find work now and in the future?

Oliver: I think they are quite important... because you can get better jobs in the yard

Stuart: Qualifications shows how much you can achieve... well they are important... shows how well you can perform in work...

Phil: Ehm well (2) they play an important part because you have to have good qualifications to be able to get a job... in the future I reckon it's going to be them all, how are you going to find a job if you haven't got qualifications if you haven't got good qualifications...

William: Qualifications are really important because say you are made redundant and you are out of work and if you got the qualifications you might get a better chance...

David: //All employers look for what qualifications you've got ... cos' I'd say (2) if you got better qualifications than another person then you got more chance of getting the job...//

Gary: Emh... well I'd say if you have qualifications then firms or industrial companies would look at your qualifications and want to employ you because you got your qualifications... so yeah (2) I'd say yeah... if you got the quals then yeah people would want to employ you more...

Euan: I think qualifications play a big part in finding a job because it shows your employer that you are willing to learn to do a job... in the future I think you are going to need them...

Luke: You spend 5 years in school working towards your grades and then in college to help you to find a job...

7a) Do you see yourselves carrying on and doing more qualifications for work later on?

Phil: Well if I have to I will do more qualifications... yeah...

[inaud talks]

Gary: Ehm... yes (2) I could see myself going to university to study engineering on a further level.

Euan: yeah... yeah... if need more qualifications to do a job, yes I would do more qualifications...

Luke: yeah... well if I have to yeah... yeah...

William: erh... yes I would like to go to university and do more in engineering.

Oliver: //Yes I can see myself doing more... the more you do the better... I can see myself going to university//

Stuart: In the future if you need to boost them up... I mean... to get a better job... yeah I would do more because you are more likely to get more jobs...

David: Yes... I would do more if need it to... I think... I would like to do my electrical degree (2) but all depends if a get enough grades to go into university...

Well, thank you very much for that. I really appreciate it, it does help me a lot but just to re assure you again, I would not use your names in any way at all, so please remember that. Thank you

A4

Student personal interview schedule

RESEARCH QUESTIONS - Andy: A Motor Vehicle Student July 2009 -

(Sentences in bullet pointed were not mentioned during the interview. These categories are for my own organisation of thoughts).

- Home circumstances and perspectives.

- 1) Do you live in Southlakes Town?
- 2) In what area of Southlakes Town do you live?
- 3) Tell me a little bit about your home circumstances: Who do you live with?
- 4) How close do you think you are with your family?

- Family occupations (working or not working as the case may be) traditions and culture.

- 1) What sort of jobs are your parents/stepparents/grandparents/brothers and sisters/carers doing?
- 2) How old are your parents?
- 3) Do your grandparents work?
- 4) Do you think that they have had an influence on your course/career/job choice?

5) If parents are not working, what is it like for you to live in the present circumstances and did it have an influence on what you are doing?

- Family achievement in education to date.

1) How did your family get on in education?

2) Do you know what your parents did when they were your age?

3) Did they leave school/or continue in further education/higher education?

4) Do you think that is there any way that your family can show the benefits of education?

- How did students get to where they are: course/career path.

1) What made you choose the sort of course or area of work you are doing at the moment in College?

2) Did anyone influence you –such as parents, grandparents, brothers/sisters in taking that decision?

3) How about the teachers? Did anyone influence you to enrol onto this course?

4) Have your friends or people you know maybe of a similar age to you/or not have influenced your decisions (in continuing in education/or future work intentions) in anyway?

- 5) Why did you go for an Engineering apprenticeship or Motor Vehicle course?
- 6) Did you consider taking on an apprenticeship in Motor Vehicle?
- 7) What are your views about what you are doing?
- 8) So far, is this course what you have expected when you first started?
- 9) Are you disappointed in any way?
- 10) Do you feel happy with what you are doing?
- 11) How about the theory bit?

- Students' attitudes and experiences in education.

- 1) Did you do well in senior school?
- 2) Did you like going to school?
- 3) What particular subject you have enjoyed the most?
- 4) In which subject you have done well/or founded interesting and which other subject you did not do well in?
- 5) Were any of your subjects important in helping you to decide what sort of area in further education/job you wanted to go into?
- 6) Do you think that educational qualifications are important for getting jobs and promotions?

- 7) Is there a relationship between qualifications and work that will help you to find work now and in the future?

• Students' future occupations and perceptions of Key Skills.

- 1) Do you see yourself being in engineering/as a car mechanic?
- 2) What sort of skills do you think you are going to need for what you would like to do in the future?
- 3) How do you see Key Skills helping you in future to get where you want to be in either work or education?
- 4) Are there any other skills apart from Maths, English and ICT that you consider as important?
- 5) If you had the choice, what other skill you would like to do alongside your course? and why?
- 6) If you had the option in coming to College to do Key Skills and not doing them at all and have the afternoon/morning off, what do you think you would choose and why?
- 7) Or would you like to do something else at the college rather than doing Key Skills? For example do more of your practical work or any other academic subject?

Conclusions: Do you have any final comment?

- Thank participants.

End of interview.

Student personal interview transcript

RESEARCH QUESTIONS – Andy a Motor Vehicle student July 2009 -

(Sentences in bullet pointed were not mentioned during the interview. These categories are for my own organisation of thoughts).

- **Home circumstances and perspectives.**

- 1) **Do you live in Southlakes Town?**

Yes.

- 2) **In what area of Southlakes Town do you live?**

Salthouse Road, in Longway Road.

- 3) **Tell me a little bit about your home circumstances: Who do you live with?**

My mum dad and my little sister and dog

- 4) **How close do you think you are with your family?**

I am very close to me dad we are dead similar ehm... personality, looks, etc. I am pretty close to me mum like... I don't really see my sister because she is always out, but I'm close to her...she is up in her bedroom most times...

- **Family occupations (working or not working as the case may be) traditions and culture.**

- 1) **What sort of jobs are your parents, stepparents, grandparents, brothers and sisters/carers doing?**

My dad does not work... because his on the sick because of his hands... a glass cut his main part of his vains... but he can't work any more.. my mum don't work but she used to work in the library

... you know the big library? Just there she used to clean at 4am in the morning... but she stopped working when she saw a ghost on morning... so she left... she was going to go back but she couldn't ...you know what women are like... full of exaggeration... always exaggerating things you women... my sister is 14 and she's in school in that new academy... she wants to be a lawyer... the teachers told her that she can get the grades... ehm.. but she wants to come to college to do beauty and therapy...

2) How old are your parents?

Me dad is 36 or 37 and me mum is 33 or 34.

3) Do your grandparents work?

Me granddad is retired he used to work in Northern Engineering Company... but I don't know what he did and me nanna she works in the school she does work in school like but... don't know what she does... I think she cleans...

4) Do you think that they have had an influence on your course/career/job choice?

Yes but I got my own motivation...but yeah they do help but really it was my decision.

5) If parents are not working, what is it like for you to live in the present circumstances and did it have an influence on what you are doing?

It makes me do more... achieve more from the family... because I do want to treat them and look after them...

- **Family achievement in education to date.**

1) How did your family get on in education?

What me dad... I don't think he did very well because he never got on with the teachers... me mum... oh shit I cant remember... I think she was a bad girl in school... so didn't do well... my sister did brilliant. she gets on with the work... teachers say she would go far if she carries on...

2) Do you know what your parents did when they were your age?

Ehm... in prision... cos' his sister was bitten up by her boyfriend so me dad stabbed him.... so he was wounded... got 12 months in... he said it was bad like... never do it again he said he learned form it... he said... my mum... don't know what she did when she was 18... had no idea...

3) Did they leave school/or continue in further education/higher education?

Me dad went to college and did joinery... me mum did nothing I don't think... I don't know... I think he did a two bits, he did a bit of ... I don't know then he went round checking the submarines... don't know what my mum did after school...

4) Do you think that is there any way that your family can show the benefits of education?

Yes, because I think it was through college that he got on in BP, I know... it might have been... I don't know.

- **How did students get to where they are: course/career path.**

1) What made you choose the sort of course or area of work you are doing at the moment in College?

No sure really, just me really...

- 2) Did anyone influence you –such as parents, grandparents, brothers/sisters in taking that decision?**

Not really...

- 3) How about the teachers? Did anyone influence you to enrol onto this course?**

No, not really....not even the teachers.

- 4) Have your friends or people you know maybe of a similar age to you/or not have influenced your decisions (in continuing in education/or future work intentions) in anyway?**

me mum and dad thought it was good, but at the end of the day it was my decision... wanted to do plumbing because of the money but then I decided to do motor vehicle because it was going to be easier for me

- 5) Why did you go for a Motor Vehicle course?**

I knew what I wanted to do... I am very enthusiastic about it and im hands on... also I enjoy the course like

- 6) Did you consider taking on an apprenticeship in Motor Vehicle?**

Yeah...without a doubt... I would love to do it.... but got to find somebody to take me on really... I just have to wait... not sure if there are any vacancies...

- 7) What are your views about what you are doing?**

I like doing this course... everything about it is just amazing never get board once because every job different...

- 8) So far, is this course what you have expected when you first started?**

No... it's a lot harder which is a good thing

9) Are you disappointed in any way?

No...

10) Do you feel happy with what you are doing?

Yeah...

11) How about the theory bit? And how did your assignments go?

Yeah... well it has to be done... better if it is practical though...

ehmm... OK... I think... finished it all.

- **Students' attitudes and experiences in education.**

1) Did you do well in senior school?

No... I was a naughty boy... cos' I never listen to teachers
...showing off

2) Did you like going to school?

No... I didn't like it I didn't like getting up... out of bed...

3) What particular subject you have enjoyed the most?

P.E. cos' is something I like doing... if you like something you are going to do it... but if you don't you are not going to do it aren't you...

4) In which subject you have done well/or founded interesting and which other subject you did not do well in?

Media, English and P.E. that was it... cos' I liked the work and got on with the teachers...

- 5) **Were any of your subjects important in helping you to decide what sort of area in Further Education/job you wanted to go into?**
No...
- 6) **Do you think that educational qualifications are important for getting jobs and promotions?**
No... it helps but is not... important.
- 7) **Is there is a relationship between qualifications nad work that will help you to find work now and in the future?**
Yeah... cos' college helps you know...

- **Students' future occupations and perceptions of Key Skills**

- 1) **Do you see yourself being in engineering/as a car mechanic?**
Yeah...
- 2) **What sort of skills do you think you are going to need for what you would like to do in the future?**
Maybe maths that's it...
- 3) **How do you see Key Skills helping you in future to get where you want to be in either work or education?**
A lot... it helps me with me maths... but that's it. I feel a bit more confident...
- 4) **Are there any other skills apart from Maths, English and ICT that you consider as important?**
Ehm... not really...
- 5) **If you had the choice, what other skill you would like to do alongside your course? and why?**

Not really... joinery perhaps

- 6) If you had the option in coming to College to do Key Skills and not doing them at all and have the morning/afternoon off, what do you think you would choose and why?**

I would probably come because it is going to help me in my near future.

- 7) Or would you like to do something else at the college rather than doing Key Skills? For example do more of your practical work or any other academic subject?**

I would go to the work shop...

Do you have any final comments?

Ehmmm no...

- Thanks for that.

End of the interview.

Coordinators of Key Skills schedule

Questionnaire for College Coordinators: Key Skills – Questions in bold reflect the questions asked to the participants.

1. Current job title and qualification (including teaching qualifications).

What is your current title and what are your qualifications?

2. Experience of a) teaching in FE other than Key Skills; b) Key Skills.

When did you start teaching in FE and what subject/s did you teach?

3. Current curriculum provision for Key Skills up to Level 2. Staffing arrangements.

What is the current curriculum provision for Key Skills and how do you accommodate the staff?

4. Students attitudes to Key Skills a) personal experience; b) hear say.

In your personal experience, what are students' attitudes to Key Skills?

5. Differences between those with jobs and those without.

In your view, are there any differences between students who have a job say for instance the Nothern Engineering Company apprentices and those without current jobs?

6. Staff attitudes to key sills a) within the team; b) with other department; c) across college; d) management.

How do staff within your team feel about the provision of Key Skills? How about within other departments and across the college? What is the management attitude towards Key Skills?

7. Staff development for Key Skills and outcomes.

Are there opportunities for staff development in the area of teaching and learning Key Skills and if so, what are/have been the outcomes?

8. Dominant model of Key Skills rationale (articles: Hyland/Chadka).

What type of model of Key Skills rationale do you apply/use?

9. Issues of female staff and masculine students. The College culture.

Are there any issues/advantages/disadvantages of female staff teaching male students and what are they? What do you feel is the dominant college culture?

10. Impact of locality/shipbuilding. Job markets-what is needed and the curriculum.

Does the town and the locality have an impact in students' attitude towards education? How about the local shipyard and the current job markets? How does the curriculum enable students to achieve their full potential?

11. Any additional Key Skills – aesthetic?

Do you teach/staff any additional skills? Such as aesthetic?

12. Role of employers - nationally, regionally and local.

Are you aware of the role of employers in the town, in the region and nationally and what is it?

13. The town factor.

Is there a 'Southlakes Town factor' as a working class town that influences on Key Skills provision?

In summary and after discussing all these issues in relation Key Skills provision, teaching and learning, locality, job markets and understanding where students are coming from: Do you have any further comments?

End of the interview.

Coordinators of Key Skills transcript

Key Skills Coordinators questionnaire: Marion [not her real name]

1. Current job title and qualification (including teaching qualifications)

What is your current title and what are your qualifications?

Well okay so I am now a Skills for Life Specialist... so yes okay that's my current title but I used to manage the Key Skills and Basic Skills department about two years ago... for one year...

My qualifications are of course first-degree in English and a subject specialist in Literacy... anyway I think these are the relevant ones...

Yeah... as I told you... I am a skills for life specialist so I got a PGCE I think this is important isn't...

2. When did you start teaching in FE and what subject/s did you teach?

In 2002 skills for life literacy at all levels entry one..... entry in fact up to level II....also pre-entry yeah...also I used to teach ESOL when I lived in France and in Holland I used to teach English as a foreign language to business people so I don't know whether that is relevant... yeah... oh, yes sorry I also taught skills for life awareness course Level II in learning support and I did learning support for all teachers where I used to work...

Also I have been asked to teach 14 to 15 year old students [laughs]... but I am not qualified to teach this group... I used to teach adults and Key Skills which in my view is totally different from skills for life..

ME: why do you think that is...?

Skills for life where I used to work, it's not like it is here... where I used to teach... I mean it's not what it's like in here... here it is a little-based basic skills

in my opinion ehm... the skills for life I taught in Macclesfield was to people who went through the education system and... so it could be 19 to 60 or 70 years but also after... they went through the system they haven't had the chance to get the qualifications they wanted.. and they come back to college to try and do it... on the other hand they might have dyslexia or just a different learning style or got pregnant or whatever, for whatever reason and so I have very motivated, well... frightened people because they have gone... through the education system again and for whatever reason... well... I found it easier for me to get them motivated and my teaching is so completely different to what they had in school and... it didn't take me long to bring them round again...

ME: in what way it should teaching different?

Well the thing is that skills for life is about personal learning and it's very important that you do initial diagnostic assessment to see exactly what the... the problems are... and so you... then you can work on the individual problems so... so it isn't a blanket you know... well, say, well...I'm going to teach this today and then something new next week... they have to have learning plans, targets so they see that they can make an improvement... taking into consideration their initial diagnostic assessment... so they make an improvement by using different strategies... so they are able to improve spellings... sentence structure or, and grammar... the resources you use are targeted to meet the needs of the learner...

ME: would you say that this is happening in Key Skills?

No no no! I mean a lot of the times the initial assessment is never used... and anyway the Key Skills here is not being taught... it's usually behavior management...a behavior management thing... action... and it's about putting people through a multiple-choice test which they don't want to do, or they might already have and they have to do portfolios which they also don't want to do... and also even if you look at the assignments where you would be able to help them with their literacy, you know, text cohesion...or whatever... and you can't because they've already got a distinction in it... as it has been marked for content... yeah... at the moment I'm trying to get a common marking scheme

across the college but as usual I don't have any support [laughs] from my boss but I am making little progress, that is, it's like banging my head against a brick wall...

ME: Why did we not have the support here?

Emh... well because the ideas are... well there are no strategies in the college for skills for life....I have written a skills for life strategy and since then it has been ignored... oh yes.. we had an outsider coming in to try to encourage us to do skills for life, an all organisation approach and it has been ignored by senior management... it's not supported by my line manager and it... it isn't supported by the Entitlement Manager of Functional Skills...

ME: Where does that take you....don't you feel demotivated?

Yes totally... I think I am in the wrong place [laughs] I know that... everything stops at my line manager then my line manager and the Deputy Director for 14 to 16 year olds... go off and talk and then they come back and do something else... sometimes they incorporate what I suggested but sometimes....most times they ignore things

ME: why is that?

Because they feel insecure in themselves, and they haven't and got the wider picture... well... I wonder sometimes when they talk about the voice of the learner and entitlement but really they are just ticking boxes, you know... and they don't really believe like I do...

3. What is the current curriculum provision for Key Skills and how do you accommodate the staff?

Well I mean... the thing is that the curriculum in Key Skills the view of the curriculum... well you see on paper it looks ok as they do a lot of things but the problem is that you don't have any buying from anybody it is a bit of a joke Key Skills here you don't get buying from the vocational tutors... the teachers who are teaching them sometime get disheartened and you know they know

they aren't teaching... well rarely, I would say rarely... and it's just a case of getting people through... there is very little teaching going on as far as I can see... or I might be a little bit negative here but anyway...

ME: this may create lack of motivation on behalf of the students

Well the problem is that with skills for life, this is what I call it... I mean literacy and numeracy skills... I mean the whole point of embedding and the problem is that they have been trying to embed for the last six years but the problem is that they say we need to embed as though it is, you know... a flick of a switch... where really it's a culture change... and when the Entitlement Manager of Functional Skills doesn't know what embedding is and... because she can't embed functional skills then you are not really on to a winner ... but recently as part of my work I gave a presentation ehm... with... to other colleagues about embedding and the Entitlement Manager of Functional Skills refused to participate or partake because she doesn't agree with our vision...

I mean I think it is very difficult not to agree with me but they manage to do that here... because I am talking logic... The problem is that I am not given the power and if you notice I am out on a limb... I don't line manage anybody any more and everything has to go through my line manager... I don't have that control so that leaves me... in a less powerful position than I was before... in my other college at least I had my team and I also was quite successful through doing this skills for life awareness to tutors across the college... my sphere of influence was quite huge and in the end I got vocational tutors sending me students who have problems with literacy to skills for life classes as opposed to Key Skills so that was my sphere of influence because they got proper teaching and because they got the skills they needed... because you know... but sometimes it was difficult for young students to join an adult literacy class but eventually in a non threatening environment after a while they got used to it and they could do some work and make progress as well... but I have not had any support here to do all of these things...

I don't think the managers manage the work here... when I came to college... because one of my tasks was to embed literacy and numeracy skills into all vocational courses and to improve the teaching and learning... but really it has to be a whole organisation approaches, you know... and in a culture like this it's so very difficult to make any changes especially if you haven't got the backing of senior management... so in teaching and learning the first thing I wanted to do is to have a teaching and learning group and in many other colleges, I mean, they have teaching and learning teams... here I had to try and implement teaching and learning training, you know... good practice sessions... and all the rest of it... and... but now I have put critical skills across the college in an effort to change the way people are taught and that has worked better than a lot of things because it is quite stimulating and gives you that creativity in teaching but the Principal doesn't like critical skills for whatever reason so I have tried to put a series of workshops on the 29th of June about critical skills but I had to call it something else so she doesn't know about it... so I called it an innovating teaching and learning workshop

4. In your personal experience, what are students' attitudes to Key Skills?

Well they refused... because, no, no, because the majority had A to C (pass levels) so they didn't want to waste their time on improving their literacy when it wasn't required for the course because as I said before they were getting, you know... reasonable marks because they were only being marked for content in their own subject area and this is also a fault of the qualification board... as well... because in the assessment criteria there is no allusion to literacy skills they don't exist in the criteria and another thing I asked to be changed is... that in every assessment that is done there is, you know, a check for spelling, punctuation and sentence structure and text cohesion... and I asked for that to happened for the last two years and I might be on the verge of getting people to change but obviously that causes other problems because their vocational tutors are not equipped to... or qualified to mark... yeah... and functional skills tutors can't mark all the assignments so... another thing I had to do, but this is not

going to help in any great way, is that I insisted that all staff have a level two in literacy and numeracy and this should have been done when the principal signed up to the Key Skills pledge because the Key Skills pledge says that all employers should make sure that all of their employees have literacy and numeracy up to level two and it wasn't done... currently, this is not happening within then teaching staff and brings into question the fact that the college, having signed up for the Key Skills pledge, has not carried out the Policy to any significant degree... but now it has been done but they think it's a 'tick box' thing but this is not only getting through the literacy and numeracy tests but they won't teach them the skills for them to be able to mark, you know, students work...

ME: how about all the students that didn't achieve agency during Key Skills

Well, the problem is that the people who needed... the awful thing is that these kids can not actually write and some of them... they desperately need... in the deepest and darkest moment the know they need to improve and they seem to be vulnerable but there is no way that the Key Skills class is the... the right atmosphere to say I need help in writing assignments... it's because of the stigma... because you know, it's like... they come to college, they think they signed for a vocational subject and all of a sudden... and they have left the maths and English behind they could never do it anyway... that's why they have chosen a practical subject and all of a sudden made to go to Key Skills.... well that creates antagonism... and the vocational tutors don't think anything of it either, so that creates the attitude of the students and you know... so you've got bad behaviour... you've got lack of achievement on the Key Skills and on the vocational course, so actually what they are doing is getting them through the vocational course, you know, so everybody is cheating so... because nobody is addressing the needs of the learner... nobody is looking at the learner as a holistic entity that has needs in the vocational area and in the literacy and numeracy and all those needs are not being addressed so everybody is cheating... and they are not like me... so passionate about students' needs...

ME: yes but they may enter the college with that attitude already, so what can be done to change it?

Could be stamped down at induction by the vocational and Key Skills tutors, if they got together... if they were passionate like me about the needs of the learner they could turn it round, they could, say, 'look, this is part of the course, we are going to help you... we are going to support you' ... you know and if it was an integral part of the course and integrated within the course so if they were doing useful purposeful relevant activities in functional skills not only in the literacy and numeracy but in the PTLS (Personal Learning and Thinking Skills) and stuff everything would be wonderful...

ME: How about teaching Key Skills within their vocational area for example for the engineering students delivering Key Skills in the workshop?

Yeah... anything... the thing is when we talk about embedding of functional skills it has to be on an individual... an area has to think how they can do it better for the learners so this idea of let's have embedding, there isn't a model, it has to be a negotiation between the functional skills staff the vocational tutors with the learner in mind and how best we do this

ME: So, teaching Key Skills in the classroom is not a good idea.... perhaps deliver Key Skills in the workshop?

Yes, on occasions yes.

5. In your view, are there any differences between students who have a job say for instance the Nothern Engineering Company apprentices and those without current jobs?

Yes well... I have taught an engineering class, I mean an apprenticeship group, and there is a huge difference... although they are not totally amicable with Key Skills but they do it and they behave... because they are being paid and if there are any problems they go straight down to their employer and they might lose their jobs... that is the incentive and the motivation and of course there is

parental control... well yes... it's a huge... the home environment and the issues outside the classroom have a huge effect on what goes on inside the classroom and the parents who work in the shipyard also they would support their children isn't it? And well, yes... they support them, well... they are a bit... they're elite a little bit... they are almost guaranteed a job so they have the incentive because they need to get the Key Skills they need to attend... they show they are good workers... they are team workers... they need to show they are good workers so you know they are the captive audience... really and as for the motor vehicle students they cannot enter an apprenticeship due to the lack of qualifications so... yeah... well it is a vicious circle isn't it?

6. How do staff within your team feel about the provision of Key Skills?

How about within other departments and across the college? What is the management attitude towards Key Skills?

Generally there is a negativity to all vocational tutors, you know that... that they are some kind of alien being... you know... so although it has improved recently with the, you know, with the overlapping of the tutorial system in the Key Skills sessions ehm... you know this is not something you might agree with but sometimes that the idea of the tutor from the vocational area comes into the Key Skills classroom has actually brought them closer together but there is a negativity within the Key Skills people... mind you there is a negativity with the whole of the people really across the college

ME: How do the management of the college see Key Skills?

Ehm... well just a bit of, oh well it's just one of those things... I mean it brings in funding but they are not really interested in Key Skills, no... unless like now for example skills for life there will be a minimum level of performance because the thing is that, ehm, you know...that this has been going for a while and no-one has tackled it and now it might be in dire straits so they will only be interested in Key Skills and when it changes to functional skills and they don't achieve...

ME: Why?

Well the numbers are dribbling ... you know we, we... cannot run classes unless we... we brake even... cos' they are not doing...

ME: Well that was always the case since I can remember

Well they have not been targeting... the right people, you know, they haven't been, ehm... they lowered themselves and kept these sorts of basic skills students... you know, sort of circulating round the classes... it's just, it's just like this is why I said it's more like basic skills than skills for life because when skills for life was incorporated it was far more than basic skills which was more like a social thing, ehm, you know, a way, I don't know, the basic skills were seen as, you know, somewhere to go, a social thing... there weren't any qualifications with basic skills and, you know, in 2004 we sort of, we got it together... people got together and it's more professional... they have to do qualifications... the teachers have to have specialism and it's... I don't think they have been targeting the right people

ME: How does the management react to this?

Well the thing is... they ignore things... they are not interested in anything unless it's going wrong because I think that they don't see the importance of skills for life... they are so target orientated and they are small minded and narrow minded that they can't see the effect of low level skills for life and achievement across the board

ME: What do they do then?

Well the only thing that gets the Principal's attention is equality and diversity competitions, enrichment activities, you know things, enterprise, anything that would raise or put the college, ehm, well, you know, the thing is that these things are important, you know, trips to Rumania are important but the problem is that it's not the bread and butter of the college although it's an important part you have to make sure that what goes on at the college is true and honest... otherwise you cannot build on it...

ME: But Key Skills brings in a high income to the college...

Well yes, and this is why they ignore it because the achievement has been about 85%, I think the money we just get you know, ehm, without much hassle so they ignore it but it's not... on paper it looks fine but the reality of the situation is far worse, it's really, really bad and because of the narrow mindless it's really bad... they don't realise that this has an effect an achievement of the vocational areas and the ability to progress for all students because they can't progress... I mean you can get people through, well I mean, obviously I don't know how they get through but to a certain level... they are holding back... they are undermining the learner and their potential in getting them through because they will never be able to progress into higher education because they are not learning the skills... and also they won't be able to go into employment because they have not got the skills

ME: It's like 'You have to get through the test' or a 'that will do' attitude isn't it?

Well yes, we became an exam factory because we are constantly having to hit targets and it's going to get worse, I mean I went to a conference recently where they were talking about the new QCF and, you know, funding for students and you know, he was very honest and he said ehm 'it will only make people cheat more' because the targets are impossible so people will cheat...

ME: What is the QCF?

It's the Qualification Credit Framework... where it's the flexibility of students being able to do a couple of units from different things and build up their own qualification, ehm, but it also means that ehm, you know... if somebody had done... it's all being built on credit... if somebody has done a certificate it's so many credits... somebody who has done a diploma it's so many credits, you know... so ehm when they got... but it is a bit ridiculous it has no parity... basically if somebody's done a couple of modules in another institution and they come here they will only be funded for part of the course so... you know, that will have an incredible effect on teaching staff and delivery and ehm, the

need to be creative in the delivery of qualifications is required and nobody seems to be taking that on board because otherwise the college will go to the wall and as we are in dire straights anyway I would have thought that that would be an important point...

ME: Not a very bright future then...

Oh no... and I am expecting a redundancy any time... I mean, you know, I don't get on with my manager, he stops everything you know every thought and I am the last in aren't I?... well I am expecting it because they have asked for voluntary redundancies and I don't think they got many volunteers because they are trying to get redundancies at a reduced amount for a shorter time so I think they are entitled to 4 months... you know somebody came to me the other day and said: 'you know that I am entitled to 4 months...I've just been to see about voluntary redundancy and they asked me to take 2 months instead of four'. They try everything don't they... Right, do you think you have got enough there...?

7. Are there opportunities for staff development in the area of teaching and learning Key Skills and if so, what are/have been the outcomes?

Well, they have done some staff development but Entitlement Manager for Functional Skills has done the majority. All requests are looked at and depending on the cost they may be approved.

8. What type of model of Key Skills rationale do you apply/use?

The problem is that although I taught and managed the Key Skills department for a while, you know, it's not really a taught qualification in a lot of areas. I would think the model has to be personalised learning, individual learning, individual learning plans you know, assessing peoples' needs and assessing them.

9. Are there any issues/advantages/disadvantages of female staff teaching male students and what are they? What do you feel is the dominant college culture?

Well I suppose there might be... ehm.... you see the problem is that in some vocational areas like construction or engineering they still discipline the student with a rod of iron as they shout at them a lot and they threaten them a lot ehm... which possibly some female tutors can or maybe other can't, they might not agree with their approach... but I don't know much about it in my experience really, it's what I see from the vocational areas so; from the vocational tutors and my own... and about the dominant culture of the college... well... ehm... negativity... they need to change

ME: Is that the students...?

No... I am talking about the staff... [Lots of laughter]...

ME: So how about the students then...

Well the culture is dictated by people at the college... which... you know, they have the opportunity to get it right and to steer it in the right direction when they were inducted... so the... the culture that surrounds has permeated their lives...

ME: But sometimes they come with that culture already...

Oh yes... yes I'm not saying... it's because they come with the culture of that institution where they've just been don't they? But we do have the power at induction to change that... and we don't... and Southlakes Town has an effect on students' attitudes to learning... yes, yes, absolutely... I mean... we can't underestimate the effect of the environment... the internal and external environment... that these sort of social issues...

ME: In what way do think...

Well, I mean, I could, you know, just say the predicted things about Southlake Town and the unemployment and the peninsular mentality... I don't really

know, in reality I can make suppositions about the attitudes to the learner and obviously their home circumstances at home where they are not supported because, you know, 'I had a job all my life and I can't write and it didn't do me any harm' sort of thing or the other is... you know... that they've got unemployed people at home and 'I am not going to get a job anyway' so you know there are all of these sorts of things going on so ehm... so which is pretty... and their social class...well, yes... social class influences the learner's attitude to learning doesn't it...?

Also the Shipyard has some kind of influence on peoples' minds... I think but I am not sure what it is, I mean it does loom large in the landscape doesn't it... ehm and it used to be a huge employer but, you know, it's not like that now is it? There are a lot of people that aspire to work in the shipyard.

10. Does the town and the locality have an impact in students' attitude towards education? How about the local shipyard and the current job markets? How does the curriculum enable students to achieve their full potential?

Well... funny enough I was asking my students what they were going to do in the future the other day and very few wanted to move... I think it's a peninsular attitude but I do think that the people in Furness are a bit weird anyway [lots of laughter] well I do [laughs] they do not like off comers, they don't like change, they are very ehm... you know, restricted in their points of view... you know, generally are very isolated, you know, and it is a beautiful... part of the world but, you know, they don't seem to want to move outside the area....also you have to take into account the financial situation... friends, family... of course there are places where people don't want to move from an area but it is not quite intense like it is in here... I mean... I would expect that youngsters would want to get out because is so depressing and is so repressive and I would expect that the youngsters to have the get up and go and have... just to want to break out... you know... just like I did

ME: And me...

And they haven't got it... no... no... don't think it's going to change... no... you can't change everything can you...

11. Do you teach/staff any additional skills? Such as aesthetic?

Well I know... I suppose it is to do with what they eventually want to do... if they want to do it, I mean the more skills they have the better... you know what I thought of that ehm, what we should be doing with them is teaching them transferable skills so the PLTS [personal, learning and thinking skills] and enterprise skills could be done within the Key Skills and within the whole group because what they need is the ability or opportunity to either get employment or be able to go into further education but a lot of these kids, I mean, specially the 14 – 15 year olds I teach, they are not used to working in groups or independently, they are not used to thinking, they are not used to discussion or articulation, I mean these are pretty basic skills that they? are coming out of school without... and you just wonder what the hell is going on at school, and I can also feel that we are getting learners passivity, we are getting learners that cannot learn and they are just being force fed information in the guise of learning

12. Are you aware of the role of employers in the town, in the region and nationally and what is it?

Everything we do it should be employer led, you know, to be able to get people into employment and... in no doubt... that employers want the best which in my view if... well if they can get the best students why pick something else...

13. Is there a 'Southlakes Town factor' as a working class town that influences on Key Skills provision?

Well it does because the problem is, you know, this is very, generalisation, I mean it's not very you.. but the influence of barriers to learning in an environment, a working class environment and genders... it's all about the lack of ambition, the poor basic skills in the population, they are thinking that

actually education isn't for them, ehm... you know, it's for the middle classes so therefore education is not for them... They're primarily working class people went into vocational jobs didn't they?... where they didn't need to apply more academic skills such as reading and writing and maths and stuff, yes it does... still... and there is a lot of work being done to move that on and I'm sure that a lot of progress has been done to change that attitude because unfortunately we cannot get vocational jobs, you know, no longer can we get jobs without literacy and numeracy skills or do qualifications without numeracy and literacy skills, so that is the problem but it seems to me that the vocational tutors have not caught up with that, ehm, they still in the round that 'I'm good with wood work so I'm going to be a joiner therefore I don't need anything else' ehm, but you know that's no longer the case

ME: In summary and after discussing all these issues in relation Key Skills provision, teaching and learning, locality, job markets and understanding where students are coming from: Do you have any further comments?

I think is a very sad situation and I think... ehm, I think the government is ignoring the effect of the target setting on the education system as a whole and I don't think we are educating people very much anymore... I think we are exam factories and education has gone out of the window and is having an effect on teaching... we have seen the teachers here how demoralised they are and how much teacher led we do and we are trying to redress that by using critical skills and by, you know, recreating activities but you know it's demoralising, at the end of the day they have to get the learners though, ehm, as one person said to me 'you know, it's all very well these activities but we don't have time for activities because we have to get through so much stuff and that is a general attitude of the teachers which is totally missing the point but that is learning in this day and age that is what is going on... and all you can do is change your own practice, and the practice of others you can influence to some extent, and some... some reason, I mean I can't get up in the morning without thinking that I am going to do something and try to change it... I can't go and do a bad job and feel ok about it because I haven't got the skills to teach 15 year olds and

when the work we do is not integrated in their vocational area, so I have a problem in teaching 15 year olds but I cannot, you know, just turn up and do a bad job... job and feel good about it... maybe teaching in their own school.

ME: Thank you very much for your time.

End of interview.

Southlakes College: Key Skills Policy

KEY SKILLS POLICY

All full time students are entitled to Key Skills and the support in Literacy, Numeracy and Information Communication Technology that this involves. This support aims to raise achievement within each vocational area and so help to improve retention across the college as a whole.

- To ensure students progress in their Key Skills competencies from a diagnosed base line on entry to a level appropriate to their ability
- To ensure the integration of curriculum context into all the Key Skills
- To ensure appropriate support for the achievement of Key Skills
- To assure the quality of all Key Skills qualifications through appropriate assessment, moderation and verification systems
- To ensure Key Skills supports all students to achieve their full potential in their vocational area
- To ensure the provision of a supportive training and development programme for all staff involved with Key Skills

Entitlement

All full time learners, 16 and over, at Furness College are entitled to undertake the main three Key Skills qualification (Application of Number, Communication & Information Technology) with the Wider Key

Skills (Improving Own Learning & Performance, Working With Others & Problem Solving) being offered to Northern Engineering Company, CITB and College Apprentices as their modern apprenticeship framework requires. Their learning program will incorporate the development of Key Skills.

Aims

- The Key Skills policy relates to improving the quality of teaching and learning of Key Skills at the College. The implementation of this policy is intended to improve the quality of the learner experience by developing the individual's ability to apply fundamental skills that underpin most vocational and academic work. Developing their essential skills should improve the learner's personal effectiveness and employability.

- The ability to apply Key Skills within vocational contexts is important, as is the ability to transfer these skills to other situations and contexts.
- The policy document sets out the Furness College objectives and strategies for planning, managing and delivering Key Skills, as well as describing aspects of the quality assurance and staff development relating to Key Skills. The strategies with the Key Skills policy apply to Key Skills across college, for all programs and all learners where appropriate. All staff involved directly or indirectly in managing, delivery and supporting Key Skills will be familiar with the aim, objectives and strategy for delivery.

Objectives

- To ensure a coordinated corporate approach
- To define support systems (managerial, resources, learner support, staff development)
- To define procedures for initial assessment and review and monitoring of learner' progress
- To support effective internal verification and moderation
- To ensure clear communication and to define procedures for sharing good practice
- To maintain the standards set by the assessment, moderation and external examination process

Provision

The three main Key Skills provided to all full time students and work based learners are:

- Application of Number
- Communication
- Information & Communication Technology
- The following Wider Key Skills offered to work based learners as their apprenticeship framework requires:
 - Improving Own Learning & Performance
 - Problem Solving

- Working With Others
- All Key Skills qualifications are offered from Level 1 up to Level 3.
- However, where student ability dictates (e.g through screening or diagnostic testing) there will also be the opportunity to undertake Entry Level qualifications.

Management

- Key Skills form part of the Entitlement Directorate within which there is a Director - Deputy and

Curriculum Manager for Key Skills.

- The day to day running of the department falls within the remit of the Curriculum Leader and the Key

Skills Tutors. Regular meetings are held with the Curriculum Manager to ensure any necessary support and guidance is available.

- The Curriculum Manager hosts meetings with the Key Skills Tutors at least once a term to provide up to date guidance and advice.

Resources & Staffing

The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) will provide a centralised resources support in the form of:

- Screening tools
- Example external assessments
- Activities and materials for skill practice to include I.T.
- Specification & Guidance Notes

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) will be developed to contain Key Skills teaching and learning materials.

Initial Assessment

All students will undertake an initial assessment and diagnostic screening to establish the level of Key Skills to which they should be working and specific topics in need of extra support.

Assessment Arrangements

- Key Skills examinations will be available both on-line and/or paper based according to the students preference.
- All portfolio assessments will be subject to verification, both internal and external.
- All assessments will be moderated to ensure application of College-wide standards.

Staff Development

- All tutors delivering Key Skills will participate in a training programme of either Level 3 or 4 in Literacy and/or Numeracy.
- All tutors assessing Key Skills will take part in the internal verification process.

Quality Assurance, Monitoring & Evaluation

- Key Skills will be reported on within the Self Assessment Report as part of the Lifelong Learning Faculty.
- Targets for Key Skills achievement will be set on a whole College basis.
- Observation of Key Skills should be included within the Observation of Teaching and Learning framework.

All policies will be formally reviewed on an annual basis from date of issue.

*Any risk aspects of the policy or its operation are referred to the Risk Management Group * This policy has been assessed for equality and diversity issues and meets the required standards

PO058 KEY SKILLS POLICY Furness College Policy Document

Department: Curriculum

Policy: Approved By: Deputy Principal - Curriculum & Quality

Next Review Due: 01/10/2010

Date Approved: 01/10/2009

Author: Director Plus

End of Key Skills Policy Report.